

The Irish Catholic

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Irish Catholics are a 'dying breed' – Diarmuid Martin

Archbishop accused of demoralising effect on priests

Chai Brady

People who come to Mass "are a dying breed" the Archbishop of Dublin Dr Diarmuid Martin has said.

He said: "I could spend all my time being concerned about the people who come to church, but they're – you know I don't want to be nasty – but they're a dying breed".

He was quoted in an article in the *New York Times* at the weekend about what the newspaper described as the 'demise' of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

A leading psychiatrist and commentator has warned that the archbishop's description of Mass-goers as a "dying breed"

would have a demoralising effect on hard-pressed priests working in parishes across the country.

Prof. Patricia Casey said that Dr Martin should be trying to "stimulate renewal on the ground in the Church in Ireland" rather than "constantly talking negatively".

The UCD psychiatrist said "being relentlessly negative has a very demoralising effect on priests in parishes who are very hard-working and are really trying to connect with people."

"A person in leadership should be trying to facilitate and aid this work rather than speaking in an overly-negative way," she said.

Prof. Casey said that

she would encourage the archbishop to look to other parts of the world where the Church is better at connecting with young people and see if "that approach might work here too".

She said that it's very easy to "point to the shortcomings without offering any solutions".

Reality

Prof. Casey said that while declining numbers of people going to Mass is a reality in the Church in Ireland, there are indications that this has stabilised.

The recent European Social Survey (ESS) indicated that in 2016, 36% of Irish adults still attended a religious service at least

once a week, this figure being only slightly down on the 2014 figure of 37%.

Prof. Casey said that if the archbishop wanted to attract more younger people to the Church he should spend more time talking to and engaging with young Catholics who do practise their faith to see what appeals to them about the Church.

In the same article in the *New York Times* the archbishop also spoke in defence of the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution that currently protects the right to life of the unborn.

"The one way the Church could lose on the abortion debate is to compromise its position," he said.



Matthew Melady (nine months) plays with a balloon at the Pro-Life conference on Sunday in the RDS Dublin. See page 10. Photo: John McElroy

PATRICK KAVANAGH

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Pope excels amid delicate politics and conflict zones PAGES 21-23



MARY KENNY

Talk to children about suicide – and explain why it's wrong PAGE 5



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The paralysing effects of negativity in the Church

The former Abbot of Glenstal Abbey Dom Mark Patrick Hederman provoked the ire of the leadership of the Association of Catholic Priests (ACP) recently when he accused them of being too negative.

It's a charge that's been levelled against the leadership of the group before and it's one that they're understandably sensitive about.

It's a symptom of a wider debate within the Church, and probably has as much to do with personality as ideology of theological outlook.

Black and white distinctions are simplistic, but people by-and-large divide into being either fundamentally optimistic or fundamentally pessimistic.

And here it's important not to confuse optimism with hope. One can be extremely optimistic but lacking hope; at the same time one can be profoundly pessimistic but motivated by a deep hope and belief that all things will be well.

“People by-and-large divide into being either fundamentally optimistic or fundamentally pessimistic”

The Archbishop of Dublin Dr Diarmuid Martin is someone else who is often accused of being overly-pessimistic or negative. I suspect that the archbishop would see it as realism, and there's certainly something to be said for people within the Church being willing to face up to realities.

The problem is that negativity runs the risk of descending into paralysis. Or worse, we end up in the cul-de-sac of endlessly analysing the shortcomings of the Church while appearing unable to do anything to address those shortcomings.

Challenges

An over-emphasis on the obvious challenges facing the Church here also obscures the great work that is being done in parishes across the country and



Editor's Comment Michael Kelly

the tiny (yet significant) ways in which the Church here is being renewed.

The reality is that renewal and decline are happening side-by-side. I fear that when people think of the renewal of the Church, they have in mind a single moment where renewal will be declared and the impetus will start from there. Authentic renewal, of course, starts from people becoming more consciously aware of their responsibility for the building up of the Church; of Catholics becoming intentional disciples and choosing to deepen their relationship with Christ.

In an interview with the *New York Times* published at the weekend, the Archbishop of Dublin – emphasising that he didn't want to be nasty – described Massgoers as a “dying breed”.

It was an unfortunate choice of

phrase and a clumsy use of language by a man often lauded for his media savviness.

In media training, one technique that participants are taught is the art of ‘reframing’ – taking a potentially negative perspective and turning it into an opportunity or a challenge. An example might be rather than referring to practising Catholics as a dying breed, highlighting the fact that the challenge for the Church is to attract a new generation of believers to replace those who are getting older.

It's not a matter of spin, or happy talk or trying to avoid reality. But, people in leadership in wider society as well as the Church have a responsibility to address the lived reality without contributing to a culture of paralysing negativity.



The Sisters of St Mary's Abbey celebrated their new book, *A Year in the Life – Glencairn Abbey*, on Saturday with an Advent Service. The book was launched by Mairéad Lavery, editor of *Country Living*, with Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan. Also present were Mother Marie Fahy, Abbess of Glencairn Abbey and Dom Richard Purcell, Abbot of Mount Melleray Abbey. The book is published by Columba Press. Photo: Valerie O'Sullivan

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Politics must be seen to work on Brexit – Derry bishop

Greg Daly

The Brexit impasse over the border and the North needs to be overcome as a matter of urgency, Bishop Donal McKewon has said.

Bishop McKewon's comments followed the breakdown of EU-UK talks after Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party rejected a plan for Northern Ireland to retain "regulatory alignment" with the Republic, thus effectively retaining the all-Ireland economy that has been built over the past 20 years.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, the Derry bishop, whose diocese is split by the border, expressed confidence that a resolution can be reached.

"I think we've all discovered down through the years that politicians eventually reach agreements of one sort or another," he said.

Agreements

Maintaining that religious leaders should not direct politicians as to how they should reach agreements or what agreements they should reach, he said it was nonetheless vital that politics be seen as capable of tackling apparently insurmountable problems.

"It's important, particularly in Northern Ireland, that politics is seen to work, because there's been a long history in

Northern Ireland of people stepping into the gap if politics aren't working," he said, adding "that applies both to local issues and to international issues, whether it's Brexit or whether it's the Peace Process in Northern Ireland".

Dr McKewon added that when faced with such problems, politicians should look beyond their own electoral bases and think in terms of the needs of the community as a whole.

"Politicians are there to serve the people, particularly those who are most in need," he said. "Politicians are not there at the service of the parties and their electorates – they are there to be servants of the population, and should not be tempted to use the populace for party issues above and beyond what people need."

He expressed concern about how failures to come to an agreement over the border and the status of the North had created an unwelcome uncertainty, which raises concerns about the economic and social fallout of Brexit in Ireland north and south.

"The whole issue of uncertainty is very unwelcome – the whole area of creating difficulties for employment on the island of Ireland is a major concern for us, because that affects everyone including the vulnerable in society," he said.

Bringing mercy to the people – who've asked for it



L-R: Fr Tom Ryan PP Shannon, Bishop Fintan Monahan, Anne Moloney, Ennis and Manager Pat Kelly at the Skycourt Shopping Centre, Shannon at the launch of this year's Mercy on the Mall in Skycourt Shannon.

Staff Reporter

Demand from ordinary people is behind a third attempt to bring the Pope's message of mercy to shoppers in the Midwest in the lead-up to Christmas.

The original 'Mercy on the Mall' in Shannon's Skycourt Shopping Centre took place in 2015 at the beginning of the Year of Mercy, Shannon parish priest Fr Tom Ryan told *The Irish Catholic*. "On that occasion we were

responding to Pope Francis' call for priests to go out into the marketplace and to engage with people and be available to them," he said, saying that first 'Mercy on the Mall' saw 20 priests busily offering reconciliation to shoppers for a whole afternoon from 1pm to 6pm.

The "overwhelming success" of that pioneering exercise and questions about "when would Santy be in the centre and when would confessions be available" prompted shopping centre

management to request that it be repeated last year, he said, with similar calls for it to be repeated this year.

"It seems the demand is there from people," Fr Ryan said. "We're doing it again this year in response to the demands that we have received from both parishioners from customers who have used the centre to have this facility during their shopping day here on December 8 to have the opportunity for confession, a blessing, a chat, or to engage with the bishop or a priest."

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Review funding system, Catholic primary schools urge Government

Greg Daly

The body representing Catholic primary schools throughout Ireland has called on the Government to review how schools are funded, following the delayed payment this weeks of grants that were due last month.

"The late payment of the Minor Works Grant has caused a great deal of unease in schools," Catholic Primary Schools Management Association head Seamus Mulconry told *The Irish Catholic*.

"This is traditionally a time when cash is tight and we really need to look

at a better way of funding schools, where schools have certainty as to what income they would receive from government during the year," he said.

"The CPSMA would strongly be arguing for a review of how schools are funded – it would argue strongly that schools need to be funded properly and to have certainty as to the funds they receive from government," he said, adding that Ireland's primary schools are underfunded in comparison to schools in comparable countries, receiving just 82% of the average funding received by schools in leading European countries.

Although welcoming this week's

announcement by Minister Richard Bruton that the delayed funds would be paid next week, Fianna Fáil Spokesperson on Education, Thomas Byrne TD told *The Irish Catholic* it was "outrageous" that some schools had had to turn to banks for overdrafts while they waited for government funding to be issued.

Management

In a statement Mr Byrne said: "The delay in the Minister making the announcement of these grants has caused huge stress for principals and management in schools nationwide.

"The grant is normally paid in early

to mid-November but this year it was unusually and inexplicably delayed."

Noting a "growing concern" that the grants are seen as optional rather than essential, Mr Byrne said: "The reality is that many schools are forced to use the grant to supplement the inadequate capitation grants. For some smaller schools around the country, the Minor Works Grant can make up almost a third of their yearly budget."

Such grants should be compulsory and on a statutory basis, he said, adding that a Fianna Fáil Government would legislate for this.

Common bodily posture at Mass is sign of unity

Susan Gately

Common bodily posture taken by a mass congregation is a sign of the 'unity of the members of the Christian community', according to Fr Danny Murphy from the National Centre of Liturgy in Maynooth. The secretary of the National Centre of Liturgy was answering questions from *The Irish Catholic* about the widespread divergence in parishes in relation to when people stand, sit and kneel at mass.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal recommends that congregations stand from 'The Lord be with you' of the Preface until the 'Holy, Holy', and also to stand at the final blessing.

However many parishes have ignored this. Bishop Brendan Kelly, a member of the Council for Liturgy of the Irish Episcopal Conference told *The Irish Catholic* there was a recommended practise. Some people wanted to be told what to do and have things "fixed from the top" whereas others did not like that.

"We are in an era where priests are inclined to be pragmatic. Absolute conformism has broken down in the last years."

In Delgany to begin Advent



College Chapel Choir, St Patrick's College, Maynooth's annual trip to the Carmelite Monastery in Delgany to pray Evening Prayer I of the First Sunday of Advent. Front row: Stephen Wilson, Mykola Diachuk, John Gerard Acton, Rev. Kevin Connelly, Antun Pasalic, Jordan MacGabhann. Back row: Pío Hartnett, Mark Moriarty, David Hodnett, Brendan Marshall, Ronan Armstrong, Anthony Hartnett.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Funeral held for much-loved priest after traffic accident

A priest who tragically died in a road traffic accident was remembered as a "beloved brother, uncle and friend, and a good, kind and much-loved priest" during the homily at his funeral Mass.

Fr Joseph McCluskey's funeral was held on Monday in St Enda's Church, Killany, Co Louth. Msgr Joseph McGuinness was the chief celebrant.

"His whole life as a priest was founded on a faith that was firm and unshakeable. It gave him a serenity and sense of purpose in his ministry which was evident to all who knew him and particularly those who had the benefit of his pastoral care," said Msgr McGuinness of the late priest.

Fr McCluskey was described as having unflappable good humour, sincerity and kindness.

Work together to revive youthful faith

Dublin's parishes should combine their talents and work together to restore the place of God in Irish life and in the hearts of Ireland's youth, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin has said.

Speaking in Ballyroan's Church of the Holy Spirit, Dr Martin said it is not easy to live the faith today but said few cultures have needed Christ's message as much.

Warning that progress is "not always in the right direction" Dr Martin warned "an increased individualism with its effects on married and family life, and a weakening of the sense of community".

The Church, he said, must be a place where people learn the wisdom "to rise above the confusion in much of contemporary culture".

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Top boxer knocked-out by poverty in Kenya

Chai Brady

Irish boxer Carl Frampton spoke of the heartbreaking scenes he witnessed in Kenya after travelling to the country with Church charity Trócaire.

Mr Frampton, a world champion boxer from north Belfast, travelled with his wife Christine, and said he would never forget what he had seen.

Recalling an incident he witnessed in which a toddler begged for food from a doctor he was speaking to, he said: "So, right away, we were hit in the face by the reality of the problems and how the support Trócaire brings to the community can quite literally be the difference between life and death."

He also met young boxers in one of Africa's largest

slums, Mukuru, in Nairobi, and said the "squalor and poverty that so many are enduring is heartbreaking".

Mr Frampton said it was "massively important" to support Trócaire's Christmas appeal. People in east Africa are facing severe drought and crop failure after the failure of subsequent rainy seasons, many are fighting for their lives.

● Sunday – shopping or a day of rest? See Page 16

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Talk to children about suicide – and explain why it’s wrong



Mary Kenny



It is utterly shocking that an 11 year-old-child, Milly Tuomey, should have taken her own life by suicide. And utterly sorrowful and distressing for the child's family.

Following Milly's tragic death, parents are being encouraged to talk to their children about suicide. Professor Brendan Kelly of TCD says that "There is no evidence that asking and talking openly about suicide increases the risk. Always ask. Always talk."

This seems sound advice – particularly in view of the dangerous material that young children may be accessing through their smartphones and screen gadgets.

Degrading

A teacher in Co. Tyrone told me recently that she was very concerned at what the children were looking at: by the time boys are 12 they seem to have seen a degrading

amount of pornography. And young girls are besieged by body images to urge them to be slim and look perfect. Milly herself felt very unhappy about her appearance, an anxiety prompted and emphasised by social media.

Counsellors say that in talking to children about suicide, parents should ask if the child is distressed or depressed about something in particular, and explore any 'plans' for suicide – the more 'planning' for suicide, the more likely it could

happen. Contact the GP, too, and ask for a referral to the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health

Service.

What is seldom mentioned is a moral point. It isn't hard to see why suicide has been regarded as wrong by most moral codes: the grief and the distress caused to others can last for life.

Christianity prohibited it for good cause.

I'd suggest telling a true story about the suffering and loss inflicted on the bereaved after suicide. There are plenty of such true stories around.

Mental health

Suicide was sometimes covered up, or left ambiguous, by coroners' reports in the past – for the very reason that families often wanted to believe that the person they loved didn't do it deliberately.

Evidently, there can be a serious mental health issue, and that should surely be addressed. It's shocking that the health system should fail to treat any young person before something drastic occurs.

Milly's bereaved mother, Fiona, has set up an organisation to help others also bereaved by suicide, calling it HUGG (Healing Untold Grief Group).

The "untold grief" are key words here, and surely that should be central in talking to young people about suicide. And one of the messages should surely be "don't do it" – it causes untold grief.

Because suicide is not just a personal, morally neutral "choice", as it is sometimes portrayed in contemporary culture.

We cannot ignore the relevance of geography

How history repeats itself, if usually in new livery and with ironic twists. In the 1900s, Home Rule for Ireland was progressing apace – the main obstruction being that Ulster Protestants were fervently against it, determined to block it.

A century later, the political arrangements of an independent Ireland are again obstructed by the same "loyal tribe", as Ruth Dudley Edwards [pictured] has named the

Ulster Unionists.

Another reprise from history: "The French are on the seas, says the Shan Van Vocht." And so in ballad and in song, Catholic Ireland looked to Continental Europe for rescue from



Protestant England's stratagems. Continental Europe sometimes seemed ready to oblige, but

sometimes misunderstood Irish culture. And sometimes the Continental nations were motivated by challenging England's maritime power.

Today, perhaps, the ballad might be "the Poles are on the seas, says the Shan Van Vocht" as Donald Tusk made his pledge that Europe would stand by Ireland against Britain's policies.

History always provides a clue to current events, yet it can often be geography that comes to play the decisive role.

Well-deserved doctorate for Máirín

Admitted this week to the ranks of Honorary Doctorate from UCD – Doctor of Laws *honoris causa* – is Máirín de Burca [pictured], now aged 79, veteran political activist and champion of the underdog. Máirín was a founder member of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement in 1970, but she was also a dedicated activist in (Official) Sinn Féin. Máirín was always fired up, most especially, about the cause of housing, and access to affordable homes for all.

Máirín began life working in shops, but soon got into political activism. She eventually quit Sinn Féin and became a pacifist. She continued to be politically active



in organisations like the Dublin Housing Action Committee and the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement.

She spent three months in jail in 1971 for participating in anti-(Vietnam) war demonstrations at the American Embassy.

She was a key player in advancing the rights of women to serve on Irish juries.

Máirín would have made an excellent Senator in Seanad Éireann with her combination of common sense, good humour, drive for justice and feet on the ground, and it's a pity the powers that be didn't nominate her for that. But she well deserves her honorary doctorate.

ADVERTORIAL

Nearly half of all homeless adults are now women

In Ireland we are currently experiencing a rapid feminisation of homelessness. According to Trinity College Dublin research by Dr Paula Mayock published in July of this year, in the Dublin region 47% of the homeless population is female, nationally, across ROI, the figure is 42%, both statistics far exceeding the European norm.

The stigma attached to being homeless for women is greater than it is for men and so too are the difficulties and vulnerabilities that they face. Homelessness had historically been an issue faced by men, meaning that the system is not set up to accommodate women. There are less emergency beds for single women and even fewer beds for couples.

Vulnerable

Many women feel so vulnerable in homelessness that they end up staying in abusive and unhealthy relationships with their partners, just for the protection and feeling of security that it gives them, even if that relationship is detrimental to their physical and mental wellbeing.

Meanwhile, women in homelessness in healthy relationships with their partners' fear going into a hostel alone. There is a greater physical toll on women in homelessness,

the harsh circumstances and external factors like drugs, alcohol or criminal manipulation take a greater toll physically.

Depaul has fought hard to provide female centric services, including services for women leaving the criminal justice system and for women that have completed a programme of rehab, as well as increasing the number of women's and couples' beds in all its emergency hostel services.

One reason for this feminisation of homelessness is down to the large number of homeless families, many of which are headed by single women.

The most recent figures released by the Irish Department of Housing showed that in October there were a total of 8,492 people living in homelessness, 3,194 of these are children in 1,463 families. Most of these are single parent families headed by women.

Family homelessness brings specific turmoil as a single mother bears the entire burden of stress and worry as they see their child growing up without the security they would wish for them.

The usual family milestones and times to make memories, such as birthdays, first days at school and

Christmas are cause for pain and anxiety as they worry for their children growing up in homelessness, whether that be emergency hotel accommodation or in a homeless service.

Depaul has a number of family services including two family services in Northern Ireland, a service for mothers and their children in Dublin and outreach services to families in emergency hotel accommodation.

Depaul was founded in Dublin in 2002 and Belfast in 2005 and now manages over 25 specialised accommodation and outreach services across Belfast, Dungannon, Derry/Londonderry, and Dublin, providing accommodation and vital services to those most in need including: families, single people, people with acute addictions, people with mental health issues, and women leaving the criminal justice system.

In 2016 alone, the organisation helped over 3,100 people struggling in homelessness. Depaul believes that homelessness has no place in our society.



Education needed on distress caused by 'missing persons'

Susan Gately

Almost 10,000 people are reported as missing to Gardaí every year. On Wednesday (December 6) a commemorative ceremony in Farmleigh, Dublin marked National Missing Person's Day. This year's theme focused on DNA matching, a technique which just days earlier, helped to identify the remains of Joe Reilly, missing since 2006.

In 2000 following the disappearance of his own cousin, Aengus Shanahan in Limerick, Fr Aquinas Duffy set up the website www.missing.ie, which gets around 10,000 visits a month.

According to the Dublin

priest the reasons people disappear are varied. "Some can be foul play, others due to mental health issues and others due to dementia," he told *The Irish Catholic*.

The largest numbers are teenagers who go missing for a weekend or a week and then return home. Often the same young people go missing again and another appeal goes out months later.

Fr Duffy believes there is a great need for an educational programme in schools, perhaps run by the Missing Persons Helpline, to explain that there are better ways to deal with stress than disappearing. "If young people realised the distress it caused their

families they would not do it. There is an educational component needed here."

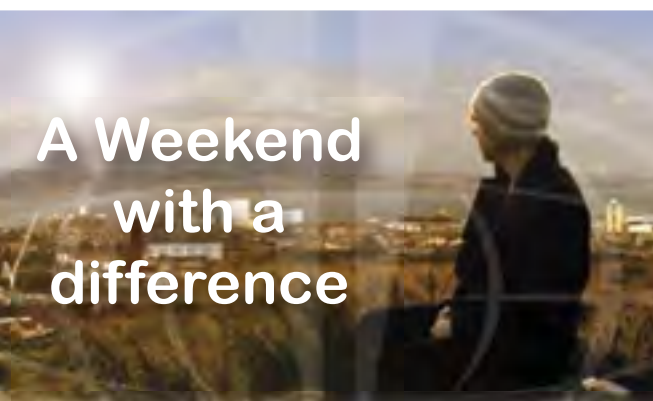
Garda statistics divide those who go missing into three categories: high, medium and low risk. A person at 'low risk' may just pack a case, take their passport and take off. However eight out of 10 disappearances are classified 'high risk'. Gardaí respond immediately to these cases, says Fr Duffy, but always need help from the public. "Be aware of people missing in your local areas. Don't ignore the posters."

Out of the 7,350 people who went missing this year (until October 2017), 61 are still unaccounted for.



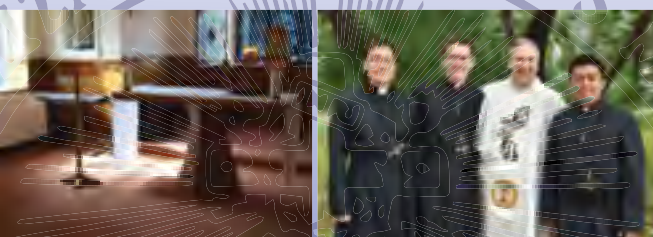
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Christmas appeal to conquer fear

The Church's overseas development charity Trócaire have launched their Christmas 2017 appeal with a new video entitled 'Until Love Conquers Fear'.

The video highlights the plight of all those facing fear this Christmas, and the work Trócaire does to respond to those in need.

The director of Trócaire, Éamonn Meehan, said: "The people we work with face lots of challenges – hunger, human rights violations, extreme poverty.

"At the heart of it, they all face fear, whether it is the fear of watching your child starve or the fear of being a victim of violence."

Trócaire's work can be supported by visiting www.trocaire.org, by calling 1850 408 408, or by visiting Trócaire's centres in Dublin, Cork and Belfast. Donations can also be made through Trócaire's ethical Christmas gifts.

New translation of Missal



Bishop Brendan Kelly of Achonry Diocese and altar-server Tom Long of Dunboyne parish prepare for a Mass broadcast by RTÉ marking the launch of the new Irish-language translation of the Roman Missal.

Sudanese New Year for Kerry Bon Secours staff

Staff Reporter

A group of staff from Tralee's Bon Secours Hospital are preparing to spend the aftermath of Christmas offering much-needed healthcare in South Sudan.

The group, which will include three doctors and 12 nurses, as well as support staff, will set out for the conflict-stricken African country on December 27, and will remain there till January 5.

"One of the doctors went with a group from England

about two years ago," Margaret Cotter, a clinical nurse specialist in orthopaedics, told *The Irish Catholic*, explaining that it had been Dr Kamal Abdalla's stories of his time in South Sudan that prompted hospital staff to organise their own expedition.

Team

"We'll be based in Khartoum, with an outreach clinic," Ms Cotter said, adding that they would work with other doctors there to form a team with seven doctors, including a

cardiologist and an orthopaedic surgeon.

Community workers, she added, would go to local schools where they would give people folders assembled by schoolchildren in Kerry and 'cool camp kids' folders from Kelloggs.

Supporters of the project had raised about €80,000 for it, she said, explaining that the plan was to use this to buy 'taxis' – motorised bikes with rear seats – for 10 families, who could then use these to earn their own incomes.

Don't forget teenagers: Society of St Vincent de Paul

Susan Gately

As church gate collections take place across the country this weekend for the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the National SVP vice-president for

members has reminded the public not to forget donations for teenagers.

"Many of the families we visit at this time of year are desperately trying to cater for their small children," said Rose McGowan, "however, there is often an

older child in the mix, who may feel very isolated during the holidays." She invited the public to donate gift vouchers, cinema tickets or tickets for "anything young people can do with their friends" for the teens.

Maria Steen

The View



Corporations not only tell us what to buy, but now want to tell us what to think

Last Thursday afternoon I was grocery shopping with my children in our local Supervalu. Inside the shop, a tall man, who spoke rather loudly with an English accent, was positioned in front of an Amnesty International stand and stopping customers to talk to them. He appeared to be superficially-friendly and was clearly well-used to catching people's attention in such a way as to engage them in conversation.

I did my shopping and as the children were helping to pack the bags at the till, he was stopping customers as they were leaving the shop. I watched him engaging with a mother and her young daughter and, after an initial brief conversation, he leaned in and seemed to say something in a lowered tone of voice to the mother. I finished at the till and, as I passed, he stopped a young man and quizzed him on his views about abortion. Clearly, he was campaigning to repeal the Eighth Amendment – one of Amnesty's stated aims.

Assuming (based on his accent) that this man is English, he should be well aware of the facts about abortion from Britain, like the fact that 20% of pregnancies end in abortion – that's one of every five babies killed before birth.

Disability

He probably also knows the eugenic effect of British law, which allows a child with a disability, including something as minor as cleft palate, to be killed right up to birth. In the case of Down Syndrome, 90% of babies with this condition are targeted by abortion. If you find this hard to believe, look at the official Abortion Statistics for England and Wales 2015 and the The National Down Syndrome Cytogenetic Register for England and Wales, 2013 Annual Report.

Amnesty International, under the directorship of Colm O'Gorman in this country, refuses to support a ban on abortion in the case of disability, because



Amnesty thinks that people should be allowed to kill disabled babies – so long as it's done before they're born. That way it can be done quietly; no one can hear them cry.

And before someone says, "they're just embryos, they can't cry", many women still don't find out about disabilities until their 20-week scan. This means that some babies with disabilities suffer 'late-term' abortions, being the end of the second trimester and into the third trimester. Of the children with Down Syndrome aborted, 8% were killed after 24 weeks, according to the 2015 England and Wales statistics.

“Amnesty defends the right of convicted criminals, who have been properly convicted of the most unspeakable crimes not to be subjected to the death penalty”

But Amnesty International, an organisation that once genuinely defended human rights, now says that it should be a human right to kill another human being – and a completely innocent one at that.

Amnesty defends the right of convicted criminals, who have been properly convicted of the most

unspeakable crimes, not to be subjected to the death penalty, because it is inhumane. Yet they hold that there is nothing wrong with a baby, who is totally innocent and supremely vulnerable, suffering a horrible death at the hands of a trained surgeon, or by chemical means, or by lethal injection into the heart. In fact, they campaign for it.

How can any organisation – particularly one claiming to defend human rights – even tolerate this notion, let alone promote it? When it comes to Human Rights, Amnesty International has a blind spot with regard to the child before birth.

Worrying and appalling as the position adopted by Amnesty International is, it comes as no surprise to anyone who has been following Amnesty's trajectory over the last number of years and its links with George Soros' money.

What is new and alarming is that shops in a major retail group like Supervalu would allow an organisation like this to campaign on their premises, and thereby apparently give the impression of lending its support to the killing of babies before they are born.

I, for one, find the idea of buying the family groceries in a store that appears happy to support Amnesty's campaign for legalised killing stomach-churning.

Did Supervalu know about Amnesty's position in relation to abortion? If not,

why not? A cursory search of Amnesty Ireland's website leaves one in no doubt about its position. Under the title, 'What We Do', is a list of their campaigns, the first of which is entitled: "It's time. Repeal the Eighth." Amnesty is calling for total repeal of the Eighth Amendment and its removal from the Constitution entirely. This would mean the obliteration of all rights for children in the womb: rich or poor, sick or healthy, male or female.

Financial support

Other questions occur too: has Supervalu given financial support directly or in kind to Amnesty? Does Supervalu intend to adopt a position on the proposed

referendum to remove the right to life for children in the womb from the Constitution?

Given attitudes to abortion in Ireland, any estimate must put the numbers of those who regard themselves as pro-life at close to 50%. At best, Supervalu's decision seems like bad business. At worst, it may be yet another example of the increasing tendency of big business to try to influence people's political and moral views.

All around the world, corporations are no longer content with merely telling us what to buy; now they want to tell us what to think.

This is fundamentally wrong on many levels. It's

not just that allowing the "greed is good" mentality to dominate human interaction that is problematic, it's that commercial interests are being allowed to shape – or misshape – democracy as we know it. This is toxic capitalism.

It is one thing for shop owners to have a different view from their customers on the matter of abortion, but an entirely different thing when they make the infliction of those views on their customers part of the shopping experience. I have always enjoyed shopping in Supervalu and supporting an Irish enterprise, but unless they can explain themselves, I will be taking my business elsewhere.

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A pro-life princess would be frowned on, writes **David Quinn**

The second season of the much-praised Netflix series *The Crown* is being released this weekend. Over six seasons it intends looking at the entire reign of Queen Elizabeth II, the longest reign in British history.

One of the things the series is examining as it progresses is how radically values have changed in that time. Elizabeth became Queen in 1952. It was a very different world. Religion was taken far more seriously, and so was marriage. In flashbacks, season one looks at the crisis that engulfed the country in 1936 when Edward VIII – not yet formally crowned – decided to abdicate when told he could not be King and marry the thrice-divorced American, Wallis Simpson. The fact she was divorced was the sticking point.

Flash forward less than 20 years to the early reign of Queen Elizabeth, and her younger sister, Margaret, found obstacles in the way of her desire to marry the divorced Peter Townsend. She did not marry him in the end.

Had Margaret fallen in love with Townsend a few years later in the 1960s, she probably would have been able to marry him because values were changing so fast by then. It would still have been a different thing if she had been next-in-line to the throne.

Divorcee

Fast forward another few decades and we find that three of the Queen's four children are divorced and Charles, the heir to the throne, is married to a divorcee. Charles himself is divorced, of course, but his wife, Diana, died 20 years ago as we all know.

So, all is changed, and that is why no-one batted an eyelash when it was announced that Prince Harry is to marry the divorced



Prince Harry with his fiancée, actor Meghan Markle, at their engagement announcement.

American actress, Meghan Markle. On the contrary, almost everyone was delighted because we all like a good love story quite aside from the fact that Markle is bringing a considerable slice of Hollywood-style glamour to the Royal Family.

From the point of view of the British commentariat, which is to say, the people who get to influence British public opinion, it helps enormously that she has all the 'right views'. She is pro-Remain, which is to say, she doesn't want Britain leaving the EU. The fact that just over half of Britons feel otherwise doesn't seem to matter one way or the other.

“Divorce no longer matters, because so many British people are now divorced”

Given that most British commentators and politicians wanted Britain to stay in the EU, what would they be thinking of Meghan Markle if she had been pro-Brexit?

She has the predictable Hollywood views on 'tolerance', 'inclusion' and 'diversity' as well. She put a picture on her social media feeds showing six hearts and the caption, 'black, cop, gay, Muslim, me, you'.

That's all very well, but suppose she had come out against same-sex marriage in the past, or believed that immigration from Muslim countries should be restricted? Or suppose, God forbid, she was a Trump supporter instead of being

a Democrat and a Hillary Clinton supporter?

Ms Markle says she is a feminist. But suppose she was also pro-life and had publicly declared herself against abortion? (It's possible to be a pro-life feminist, the type does exist). Would this find favour with Britain's opinion-formers? I suspect not.

In fact, I suspect it would be very hard for Prince Harry to marry a woman who had publicly known socially conservative views on issues like marriage and the right to life. That would cause plenty of publicly-vented angst.

But if it also transpired that she was a Trump-style Republican, that is, opposed to gun control, in favour of the death penalty, in favour of curbs on immigration and so on, I suspect the marriage could not go ahead. I suspect there would simply be too much opposition to it.

In other words, in any period there will be values that, were they to be found in a prospective spouse to a member of the Royal Family, would be a deal breaker.

Divorce no longer matters, because so many British people are now divorced. The fact that Harry is currently living with Meghan doesn't matter either because couples living together before they marry is absolutely the norm and why should the Royal Family be any different?

In fact, it might even look a bit strange if Harry and Meghan did not live together first. Cohabitation is now so normal as to be

together do not lower their odds of getting divorced later and might even increase the odds.

Queen Elizabeth, of course, recently celebrated 70 years of marriage. If *The Crown*, and other sources, are to be believed, her marriage to Philip went through a very rocky patch decades ago. In a different, later time, they might even have divorced. But the fact that they rode out the alleged rough patch and now seem to be happy together ought to be a lesson to society that often divorce is not the answer (assuming you believe divorce is ever the answer).

“Meghan Markle has safely conformist, liberal views on everything”

I'm not sure if British society is ready for that

lesson, however.

In any event, we can say for certain that the time when a Royal could not marry a divorced person is long past. But we can also say with almost as much certainty, that a prospective spouse to a Royal must still conform to certain values or be considered beyond the Pale.

Meghan Markle has safely conformist, liberal views on everything, it would seem, and so British opinion-formers like her.

If she had outspokenly traditional views on issues like marriage and the right-to-life it would be a different thing entirely, even if she promised to keep those views to herself upon becoming a royal princess.

David Quinn book, *How we killed God* (and other tales of modern Ireland), is out now.

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Supporters 'buoyed up' by PLC conference

Greg Daly

The Oireachtas committee on repealing Ireland's constitutional protections for unborn children had focused minds ahead of this year's Pro Life Campaign annual conference, according to a PLC spokesperson who said those at the attendance had left feeling "very buoyed up".

"I think the fact that there was such a great attendance at this time of the year particularly shows that people are really focusing on the issue," Cora Sherlock told *The Irish Catholic*, explaining that "their minds are focused because of the Oireachtas committee and because there is so much talk about it, with the report coming out later this month".

Experience

"I think people came here today wanting to find out how they could get involved and I think they went away very buoyed up – that was very



clear," she added.

The day's two main speakers had complemented each other particularly well, she said, with the UK's David Alton mapping out Britain's abortion experience.

"I think a very important point of his speech is the fact that back in the 1967 act abortion was presented as something restrictive, and that idea we expect to happen in Ireland as well," she said.

"We expect whatever proposal is put to the people will be presented as something restrictive, but it won't

be restrictive because there isn't any such thing. He was there to really put flesh on the bones of that idea and to really show the history of what's happened in the UK."

In contrast, she said, former Planned Parenthood manager Abby Johnson effectively used her talk to bring people into an abortion clinic.

"That's really what she did, as one person put it to me, and it was very effective," Ms Sherlock said.

"It was something that you wouldn't forget, for one thing, and something that would

make you go away and work very hard to make sure that something like that doesn't end up happening in Ireland, because her talk highlighted the inhumanity and the brutality of what abortion means to the baby."

Attitude

Mrs Johnson also gave an insightful picture of how the care and wellbeing of women can be disregarded in such clinics, she said, adding: "She talked about how people working in abortion clinics become desensitised over



Brenda O'Connell (Kerry), Muirren O' Connor (Kerry) and Emma Sutton (Wicklow) at the Conference and, left, an overview of the attendance. Photos: John McElroy

time to what they're doing – that there's a very flippant attitude to human life that we don't expect and we're not used to in Ireland."

"So I think between the two of them they gave a very good analysis and a very good presentation of what abortion means in reality which is what we in the Pro Life Campaign are trying to get across, and what people on the Oireachtas committee are completely ignoring," she said.

The day will have helped not merely inform people,

but also give them opportunities to network and to plan to work together on the ground, she says, with there being opportunities for people to sign up to various initiatives, one real highlight being the launch of the 'Love Both' app.

Available from both the Apple Store and the Play Store, the app, she says, "will help people stay in contact, find out more about what the PLC is doing, and generally just really be very involved online in pro life activity over the next few months".

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Swimming against the tide in defence of the Faith

For almost 25 years, David Quinn has been a thorn in the side of the liberal establishment both within the Church and in wider society. As Director of The Iona Institute think-tank and a former Editor and columnist with *The Irish Catholic* he has often been a solitary voice.

His stubborn refusal to bow to what he sees as groupthink has won him both admirers and critics. Now, he has just published some of his selected writings in a provocative new book entitled *How We Killed God and other tales of Modern Ireland*. From abortion and same-sex marriage to the war in Iraq and the horror of clerical sexual abuse, David tackles some of the thorniest issues in contemporary Ireland.

The title is apt and speaks to Mr Quinn's belief that God has been banished from both private and public life as "a relic of a more primitive age".

"Official Ireland has banished him from view almost completely. Many people have done the same thing in their own lives and for the same reasons. God became for them a symbol of the word 'no' and people don't want to hear that word in their lives," he says.

“David believes that ‘the task before all Christians now is to make him visible again’”

"Many others who still believe in God and want him to be part of their lives want to reduce him to the role of a servant of their wishes.

"He's good to turn to when you're in trouble, but he's basically there to smooth the path for you, to affirm you and give you a pat on the back for your efforts. He is not there to challenge you to greater things, never mind be a judge."

It was Nietzsche who told of a madman who ran through the town saying, "God is dead and we have killed him". For David this "we" includes the Church itself sometimes.

"The Church could be tremendously authoritarian. If God in many people's minds represents the word 'no', it's because the Church has often



Irish Catholics have to work hard to make God visible again, David Quinn tells Michael Kelly

presented him that way. And this is without even mentioning the hugely harmful effects of the scandals."

He thinks that the disaster for the Church, and for society, is that when people think of the word 'Church', they think of the institution, of the bishops and the priests and the religious. "This would be a bit like thinking of the FAI when you think of soccer. They don't think of Jesus and all the people making a genuine effort to follow him," he says. "So, the Church has also helped to 'kill' God and eliminate him from view. Except you can't really 'kill' God, of course, you can only pretend he doesn't exist and that he doesn't matter."

David believes that "the task before all Christians now is to make him visible again".

One thing that belief in God sustains is the belief that we are all created equal in dignity and moral worth, and David is not convinced this can survive the 'death' of God over the long term.

"Evolution on its own suggests the opposite; that we are radically unequal. Many of the critics of Christianity believe we are of equal dignity and moral worth without being able to give this a proper philosophical justification.

"They just assume it, without realising they assume it because 2,000 years of Christianity has made it seem self-evident. It is not self-evident at all."

Marginalisation

In his more than 20 years as one of Ireland's most controversial newspaper columnists, David has been charting the marginalisation of God and religion in Irish life. He has been a ready champion for causes that he is passionate about and has been willing to step forward to put an argument where others have feared to tread.

In the unreal world of social media, Mr Quinn is

regularly subject to online tirades of abuse that would leave a lesser man shaken. In the political world, he is a formidable opponent. His strategising around key issues and his sheer ability to make a logical argument make him a voice that his detractors cannot easily dismiss.

While he would be seen as one of the staunchest defenders of Catholicism in Ireland, he has not been shy about denouncing corruption in the Church where it has been exposed.

When it came to the clerical abuse crisis, he was one of the first commentators out of the traps to insist that the Church must listen to those who have suffered and work to bring healing and compensation for the pain caused. He went so far as to call for heads to roll when senior prelates were shown to have been lax in their handling of abuse allegations.

“Most people have never heard of me. I'm unpopular with people who don't like the Church”

"Big deal", some might say. But, from one of the more-respected voices speaking from within the Catholic tradition, Quinn's interventions were a big deal.

Does David ever feel disheartened by some of the criticism he receives? It's water off a duck's back. "Let's not exaggerate," he laughs, "most people have never heard of me. I'm unpopular with people who don't like the Church."

"On the other hand, I get a lot of emails of support and phone calls of support and people sometimes stop me in the street and say, 'well done,' or 'keep up the good work'."

"When you stand up for something you will attract praise and criticism. Obvi-

ously, I go against the current secular consensus by and large, so I'm not going to win much support in fashionable quarters. So be it," he says.

i How We Killed God and other tales of modern Ireland is published by Currach Press and available in all good bookshops and www.currach.ie



David Quinn signs a copy of his book during its launch in University Church, Dublin.

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The poet can help us declutter to prepare for the coming of Christ, writes **Sr Una Agnew SSL**

When Patrick Kavanagh leaves home to go to live in Dublin in 1939, he does so in the belief that, relieved of the constant constraints of farming, he will be free to pursue his writing ambition. He will also, he hopes, have an opportunity in Dublin to meet with established poets and writers. This dream, he soon learns, is an illusion. Too many writers in competition with each other trying to eke out a living in the city, and in war-time, means that he is often ignored or written off as a blow-in peasant poet. Secretly, however, many envy him the lyrical genius that is already evident in *Ploughman and Other Poems* (1936).

He lands himself in Dublin with a very limited formal education. He tries his hand at journalism, and occasional newspaper articles – even film-reviews – but he survives mostly on the financial support of his brother Peter, who is now a qualified teacher in Westland Row Christian Brothers school.

Despite an initial sense of freedom to write, Kavanagh feels himself in exile in Dublin feeling more and more the loss of the familiar landmarks of home. He tries to gain recognition among Dublin writers and journalists by frequenting the Dublin pubs especially the Palace Bar where writers and journalists at that time seemed to congregate.

Victim

There was a strong drink culture pertaining to writing. He wasn't a heavy drinker when he lived in Inniskeen; an occasional bottle of porter was all he could afford. But, soon he succumbed to some extent at least and became victim of this drink culture.

City life was now taking its toll and he knew it. He missed the quieter rhythms of farming life. There are too many distractions, too much time spent drinking, vainly seeking the attention of women and fighting for his rights as a poet. The poet in him who walked the hills of Inniskeen, "loving life's miracles", who had sat alone in his little 10x12 room above the kitchen where "its little window lets

Journeying through Advent with Patrick Kavanagh

in the stars" was now bombarded by too much. He, the lover of whins and bogholes, even the weeds and grass that fed his creativity, was losing something important to his *raison d'être* as a poet. He was losing his capacity for wonder and awe which we know is the beginning of a sense of the Transcendent in life which we as Christians name as God.

The poem 'Advent' is a sequence of two sonnets. In it, Patrick Kavanagh confronts his dilemma and, at a very opportune moment, the onset of Advent. Brought up in a deeply-religious family, he knows that Advent is a time of purification, fasting and preparation for the coming of Christ.

“His poetry he knew was the precious outcome of ‘the luxury of a child’s soul...’”

He stops to reflect and to take himself to task for squandering some of his real poetic resources. He addresses himself in a forthright way, almost chastising himself with the words: "We have tested and tasted too much, lover."

For all his awkward overtures to beautiful women on Grafton Street and Raglan Road, the authentic lover in himself is being suffocated. Kavanagh often talks to himself, to his many selves! He also takes himself in hand by writing. At this point in time, he is in urgent need of purification in his deepest soul. He needs radical simplification of lifestyle to counteract the bombardment of his soul by the "too much" of everything he has recently begun to experience.

Using a double sonnet format, he addresses his loss of innocence and wonder and in a second movement, sets out

to restore his soul to readiness for an authentic celebration of Christ's coming.

Entering the solitude of his "Advent-darkened room", he craves again the memory of "a black-slanted Ulster hill", his own Shancoduff, his triangular hill, that could restore renewal to his soul. He thinks also perhaps of his little room over the kitchen that could restore him to the wonder of little things.

Kavanagh was particularly fond of restricted vision, probably derived from the cramped space of his family home, yet whose little window "lets in the stars".

So far, the city has been making too great an assault on his senses and starving the real lover in himself, whose soul's desire craves solitude, simplicity and an almost monk-like austerity. He says in another poem, that envisions him in his little room over the kitchen: "I am like a monk in a grey cell/copying out my soul's queer miracle."

His poetry he knew was the precious outcome of "the luxury of a child's soul..." For Kavanagh, this is not childishness, but a quality of openness, receptivity, open-mouthed curiosity – a quality of wonder. Wonder, he knows, is the beginning of philosophy. It leads to awe which evokes awareness of God's presence in the universe.

Kavanagh knows that he has to embark on some cleansing ritual. He mentions the traditional "dry black bread and sugarless tea" of the Advent fast long ago... Kavanagh did not need this, he was so poor he often had to borrow a shilling to buy bread pretending it was for the gas metre. But he desperately wanted to find his own way, his own poet's practice of becoming alert to the newness in everything...to be re-awakened to the wonder of the world and the people around him.

He wants all of us to join with him in discovering this mystery of newness, to put to rout boredom, any sense of the staleness of things or a know-it-all mentality that robs us of the wonder of seeing things, as if, for the first time...

*We have tested and tasted too much, lover-
Through a chink too wide there comes in no wonder.
But here in the Advent-darkened room
Where the dry black bread and the sugarless tea
Of penance will charm back the luxury
Of a child's soul, we'll return to Doom
The knowledge we stole but could not use.*

*And the newness that was in every stale thing
When we looked at it as children: the spirit-shocking
Wonder in a black slanting Ulster hill,
Or the prophetic astonishment in the tedious talking
Of an old fool, will awake for us and bring
You and me to the yard gate to watch the whins
And the bog-holes, cart-tracks, old stables where
Time begins.*

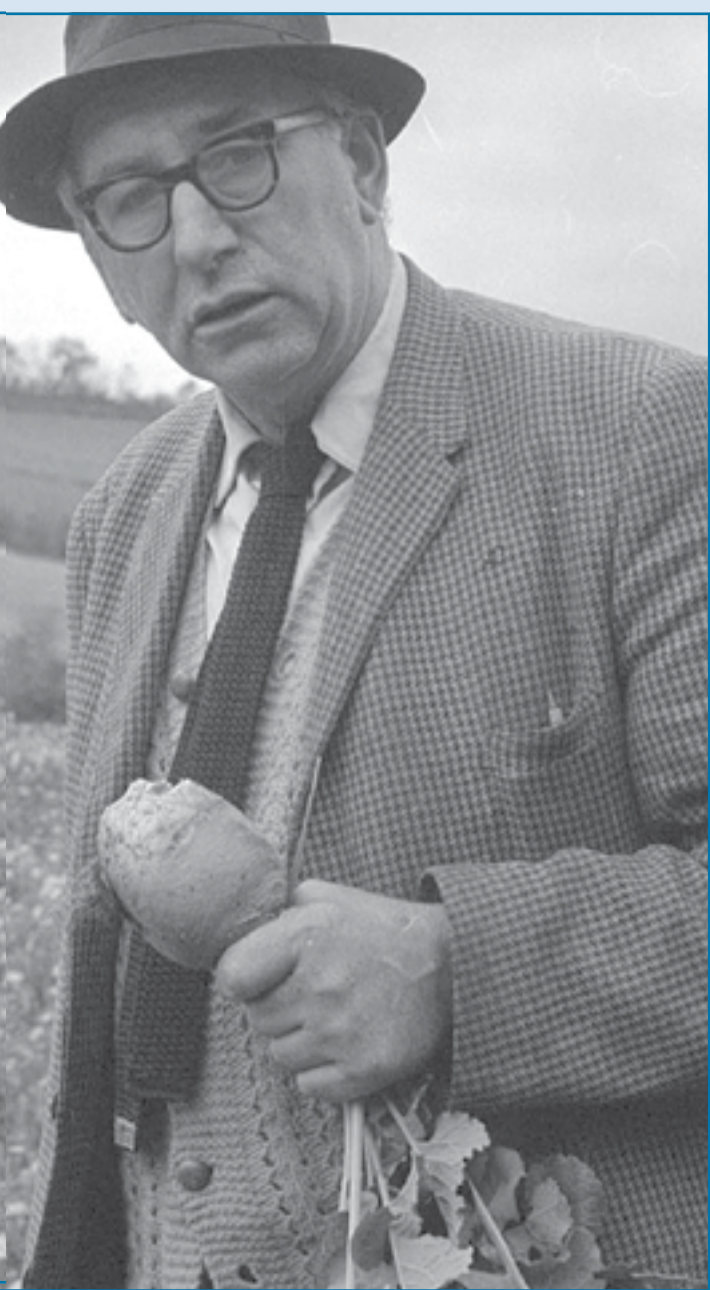
Visualisation

What is noticeable in this first part of the poem Advent, is the poet's deliberate visualisation of an icon of peace, tranquillity and innocence. His memory calls up for him a powerful icon of innocence, "the spirit-shocking /Wonder in a black slanting Ulster hill". Kavanagh had fallen in love with a hill which he knew was "Love's doorway to Life". "On the stem of memory imagination blossoms".

Remembering will be the key to reawakening. He recalls a neighbour's banal conversation, "the tedious talking of an old fool"...yet he

Sight is one of the greatest gifts you can give

Paulo Nazaeli (aged three months) from Tanzania had his sight restored after a successful cataract operation.



longs to hear it once more. He is nostalgic for his childlike wonder at whins bushes, bog-holes, he once explored as he said himself, "lost in unthinking joy" and old Stables, that evoked for him something of the mystery of Eternal Time, a forceful reminder of the Christmas story.

“What image of peace and calm restores in us to ‘the luxury of a child’s soul’”

So, how does Kavanagh’s Advent get himself back on track? He pictures for himself a time and place where he could dwell in his imagination and where his vision was clear and unspoilt. The simple icon which he places before his imagination is the triangular hill of Shancoduff in the shade of the big Forth of Rocksavage.

Let us pause at this point and try to visualise our image, what will be our Advent icon, that brings peace and helps us to detox in this lead up to Christmas freed from the pressures of ‘Black Fridays’ and ‘Cyber Mondays’ and all the hurry and excessive fuss that can smother out the real meaning of Advent and Christmas!

What image of peace and calm restores in us to “the luxury of a child’s soul”. It may be a quiet place of prayer, a walk along the seashore or a window that lets in our star, even a spot in our back garden where the birds come to feed...somewhere we can shed our worries, cares and busy-ness and find our soul. Let us find this place and rest there for a few moments.

Second stanza of ‘Advent’: visualising the difference

Every spiritual practise makes a difference. It makes an adjustment, however slight, to the quality of our lives, even if we only practice it for five minutes every day.

The second half of ‘Advent’ is at pains to visualise, in detail, the change that will take place when a personal problem is acknowledged, the need expressed and taken in hand.

The poem ‘Advent’ provides us with a template of how Kavanagh managed his life at this juncture. He was complex in his character yet it was “on his hand, the humble trade of versing which could easily, restore his equanimity”. He places great store in the hope that by writing, he can make it happen.

*O after Christmas we’ll have
no need to go searching
For the difference that sets
an old phrase burning-
We’ll hear it in the
whispered argument of a
churning
Or in the streets where the
village boys are lurching.
And we’ll hear it among
simple, decent men, too,
Who barrow dung in gardens
under trees,
Wherever life pours ordinary
plenty.
Won’t we be rich, my love
and I, and please
God we shall not ask for
reason’s payment,
The why of heart-breaking
strangeness in dreeping
hedges,
Nor analyse God’s breath in
common statement.
We have thrown into the
dust-bin the clay-minted
wages
Of pleasure, knowledge and
the conscious hour-
And Christ comes with a
January flower.*

Kavanagh makes a deliberate return to the practice of wondering at everyday things. We, too, can find our small daily wonders. It is not likely we will be present at a country churning but we have our own rituals where arguments occur about who empties the dishwasher or puts out the bins.

The renewed consciousness envisioned by Kavanagh will restrain our judgementalism; free us from our favourite self-righteous perch on the high moral ground, where we feel confident we know what is best for everyone. This high moral ground, often despised by Kavanagh, is not necessarily the friend of authentic Christian spirituality.

“In this renewed state of mind Kavanagh sees the value of what others might call menial work”

Better be aware rather, of our own vulnerabilities, and allow ourselves be moved to compassion of heart that seeks to find good in everyone. In this renewed state of mind Kavanagh sees the value of what others might call menial work, “men who barrow dung in gardens under trees”.

No one is to be omitted from the largesse of Christ’s coming. With hospitality of heart as his ideal he celebrates the “ordinary plenty” of the everyday and declares himself rich, now that he has “thrown into the dust-bin the clay-minted wages/Of pleasure, knowledge and the conscious hour”.

A radical cleansing, we feel, has taken place in the poet, which we as Advent

people only hope to emulate.

He asks in particular that we refrain from trying to analyse our new-found wonder. It is especially unhelpful to attempt to fathom “the heart-breaking strangeness in dreeping hedges”. Only someone who has stood still near a hedgerow and listened to seepage of raindrops through a hedge, will understand what the poet means. ‘Strangeness’ for Kavanagh means mystery, and even the most casual greeting spoken in passing can carry something of the breath of God.

To reach this state of spiritual richness, we wonder what is it we need to throw in the dust-bin this Advent? It could be a grudge, a hurt, an unhealthy practice. There is an area of life that each of us can resolve to declutter!

Both agendas set out by this poem Advent, which Kavanagh has set for himself have been addressed.

“There are infinite possibilities of renewal that lie within the potentialities of our graced selves”

They are applicable to all of us. First there is the letting go of too much, our excess baggage, our need for detox and secondly a renewal of vision, understanding and gratitude.

These require discipline, purpose and visualisation of positive alternatives. Kavanagh is skilled in opening up positive alternatives to “the too much” of life. There are infinite possibilities of renewal that lie within the potentialities of our graced selves if we take time to find them.

We need to treasure our personal Advent icon, whatever it is, that will quiet our souls and help us to wait upon Mystery in the true spirit of Advent.

The sonnet structure, along with the asceticism proper to the Advent season, inspired the poet to renew himself in spirit. Can we too aim at discovering our own Advent transformation and as a result, find a rekindling of wonder in little things, gratitude “for the ordinary plenty” in a world where many are starving?

We hope too, that our efforts to wait in hope for Christ’s coming, may be crowned by the expectancy of epiphany, a renewal of hope when Christ comes with “a January flower”.

1 This is adapted from an advent reflection given by Sr Una as part of the Presentation Brothers’ ‘Monday at the Monastery’ event in Glashule on November 27.



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100 students rewarded for academic prowess at MIC



LIMERICK: AnnMarie Brosnan from Killarney, Co Kerry receives an award in Theology and Religious Studies as part of her BEd degree in MIC, pictured at the Mary Immaculate College Awards Ceremony with Prof. Eamonn Conway and Dr Patricia Kieran. Photo: Brian Arthur



MAYO: Fr Richard Gibbons PP, Rector, Knock Shrine with His Excellency Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo, Papal Nuncio and Most Rev Michael Neary, DD, Archbishop of Tuam at November's performance of Handel's *Messiah* at Knock.



DUBLIN: Fr John Jenkins, Patrick Cassidy and Fr Bill Dailey at the inaugural performance of Mr Cassidy's *The Mass* at the Notre Dame-Newman Centre for faith and reason. Photo: John McElroy

IN SHORT

DIT chaplaincy celebrates Luas opening

Celebrating the opening of the new Luas line at the Grangegorman campus of Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), the Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy Service at DIT are offering "a vibrant week of events" from December 11-14 in St Laurence's Church.

Admission to all events is free and begins on Monday 11 at 2.30pm with historian Joan Kavanagh from Wicklow Gaol who will give a presentation based on the book *Van Diemen's Women: A History of Transportation to*

Tasmania. In the talk the link with deportation of women and their children from Grangegorman to Tasmania will be given particular consideration.

On Tuesday at 1pm there will be a mindfulness session, followed by a lecture from Emer Dennehy from Transport Infrastructure Ireland and Teresa Bolger from Rubicon Heritage Ltd at 2.30pm who will illustrate how the cholera epidemic of 1832 led to the establishment of the Dublin Cholera Hospital at Grangegorman.

On Wednesday at 2.30pm Emmet Gill from Na Piobairí Uilleann (The Uilleann Piper's Club), who have a close association with the area around the campus, will

give an overview of the uilleann pipes, talk about the club's role in reviving the instrument and will play some traditional Irish tunes.

Finally at 4.30pm on Thursday the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama will help celebrate the Christmas season with a performance of Christmas carols.

Columban missionary witnesses Papal visit to Myanmar

Just days after the Columban missionaries at Dalgan Park, Navan, celebrated the beginning of the centenary of their foundation, Fr Eamon Sheridan witnessed at first hand the hope and joy of Pope

Francis's visit to Myanmar.

A native of Drogheda, Fr Sheridan is working in Myanmar where he works at a centre for alcohol and drug rehabilitation.

Fr Sheridan said the Pope's visit was a wonderful boost to the small Church community in the country. "By coming here, the Pope certainly lived up to his call for the Church to go to the periphery," he said.

"I didn't go to the capital city to see the Pope. I am living now in a Catholic run rehab centre in the North East of Myanmar," Fr Sheridan explained. "The Columbans worked in this area from 1936 until 1978 when they all had to leave. There are 40 young men here who are trying to recover

from alcohol and drug addiction.

"The disease of addiction is an epidemic here. Approximately 50% of drug users are HIV positive. In response the Church has set up this centre. It is a very basic place; there are no frills, finances are a constant problem. But God has supplied and the centre offers hope to people who previously were hopeless that they could ever get recovery.

"As they were unable to go to Yangon, I decided to stay with them and watch the Pope's visit on TV with them," Fr Sheridan said. He described the excitement as they gathered around the TV to watch the Papal Mass celebrated in Yangon.

Edited by Chai Brady
chai@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



MYANMAR: Irish priest Fr Eamon Sheridan works in Myanmar's Kachin State helping 40 young men with alcohol and drug addictions. He watched the Pope's visit to the country on television with them.



CLARE: Rev Martin Shanahan is congratulated by Bishop Fintan Monahan after his ordination to the diaconate.



LIMERICK: Bro. Emmanuel O'Hara OSB with Abbot Brendan Coffey OSB of Glenstal Abbey after Bro. Emmanuel's simple profession of monastic vows.



CORK: Principle Donnchadh Ó Briain, religion teachers Lisa Dillon, John Moher, Eithne Stanton SNA, John Hurley and Helen Barry of St Mary's High School at the newly refurbished mausoleum of Venerable Nano Nagle. The Principal and religion department accompanied 72 Transition Year students on a guided tour of the newly developed Nano Nagle Place centre on Douglas Street, Cork City

ANTRIM

Advent evenings at Clonard Monastery in Belfast on Tuesdays, December 12 and December 19, starting at 7.30pm. Reflecting on the Gospels for Advent using art (*visio Divina*), guided meditation, prayer, video and song. Sign up by emailing reception@clonard.com or phoning 00 44 2890 445950.

ARMAGH

Eucharistic Adoration in St Malachy's Church, Armagh daily from 6am to midnight, and all night on Wednesdays.

Adoration chapel, Edwards Street, Lurgan, adoration on week days from 9am-9pm.

CORK

Life in the Spirit Seminar in Knockavilla Community Centre (Innishannon/Knockavilla parish). Introductory night on Friday February 2 at 7.30pm, followed by 7 weeks Life in Spirit Talks, Friday, February 9-March 23 at 7.30pm. Speakers include Fr Brendan Walsh, Brigid Haran, Tom O'Dwyer, Sr. Bridget Dunne, Janice Carrig, Marie Beirne, Chona Evans and Noel Byrne. Tel. 087 4589133.

A pro-life Mass is held on the last Friday of every month at the Poor Clares monastery, College Road, at 7.30pm.

Medjugorje prayer meeting in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament every Wednesday night at 8pm in Holy Trinity Church, Father Matthew Quay. Prayers for healing first Wednesday of every month.

Maria Vadia and Fr John Keane will lead a day of Prayer, Praise, Worship and Healing in Rochestown Park Hotel, Douglas on Sunday March 4 in 2018, commencing at 9am and concluding with Holy Mass at 5pm. Registration not required and free entry. Contact Celia on 087 2405568.

CLARE

Abbey Cluster Christmas Reconciliation Service on Monday December 18 in Ennis Cathedral from 7.30pm to 8.30pm

Saint Vincent de Paul Christmas Church Door Collection takes place in December on Saturday 9 and Sunday 10. Donations can be left at Parish Office or SVP Shop 86 Parnell St. Please support.

DERRY

Dungiven Parish: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Mon-Fri, 8am-noon and 3-9pm.

DUBLIN

Mondays at the Monastery: Presentation House, Glashule Road

Divine Mercy Devotions in the Church of Three Patrons, Rathgar every First Friday at 7pm. Mass, Benediction, chaplet & blessing with relic of St Faustina. Confessions available.

The Dublin 15 Faith and Justice Group welcomes new members and currently meet on the first Friday of the month in Hartstown Church. Contact Fr Joe 087 6632944.

Divine Mercy Mass and holy hour 7.30pm every Tuesday in St Saviour's Church, Dominick Street. Also daily Divine Mercy prayers at 2.30pm at the shrine with the relic of St Faustina.

Our Lady of Knock prayer meetings

take place on the last Thursday of every month in St Gabriel's Nursing Home, Glenayle Road, Raheny, D5, from 8pm-9pm.

Life to the Full (John 10:10) book club for young adults meets every Thursday from 7-8.30pm in St Paul's Church, Arran Quay (Smithfield) to meditate, share and discuss life & faith. Refreshments provided. www.facebook.com/lifetothefullbookclub

FERMANAGH

A Mass to St Peregrine for all the sick is prayed each Wednesday evening in St Patrick's Church, Derrygonnelly at 7.30pm. www.churchservices.tv/derrygonnelly

KERRY

The Alliance of Two Hearts First Saturday vigil of adoration and reparation in Caherciveen parish church at 3pm; Divine Mercy chaplet, adoration, rosaries. Mass at 7.30pm.

Candlelight Rosary Procession leaves The Parade on Friday December 8 at 8pm, arriving at Black Abbey for Benediction.

KILDARE

A centring/contemplative prayer group meets in the Old Baptistry of St Michael's parish church in Athy every Thursday at 8pm. For more info ring Dolores at 086-3474679

LOUTH

Young adults: spend an hour of quiet and peace with others, in a prayerful, candlelight setting, with Taizé music. Friday December 1, from 8.30pm to 9.30pm, followed by a cuppa. 'Bethany', 34 Point Road Dundalk, Co. Louth.

MAYO

The next Latin Mass in the Old Rite (Tridentine) will take place on Sunday December 10th, in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel at Knock Shrine at 5.30pm.

OFFALY

Clonmacnois Christmas Prayer Vigil in Cluain Chiarain Prayer Centre on Friday December 15. Mass at 9pm. Adoration and Prayers follow until 2.10am. Enquiries Dave: 085 7746763.

ROSCOMMON

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at St Croan's Church, Ballymoe, every Monday 10-11am and Thursday 8-10pm. Also at St Bride's Church, Ballintubber, every Wednesday 7.30-8.30pm.

SLIGO

Latin Mass in Carraroe on the last Sunday of each month at 3pm.

WATERFORD

Exploring St John's Gospel with Fr Michael Mullins, Tuesdays 8pm-9pm in the Edmund Rice Centre.

WICKLOW

The Glencree Parish Group hold a special Mass for healing in St Kevin's Church, Glencree on the First Saturday of every month.

Eucharistic adoration, St Mary & Peter Church, Arklow, every Tuesday & Friday 2-7pm & Sunday 2-5pm.

St Patrick's Prayer Meeting on Thursday evenings at 8pm in the De La Salle Pastoral Centre, Wicklow. Come for prayer, scripture, music and a cuppa.

Embracing a day of rest

Late last month, Polish MPs approved a bill aimed at phasing out Sunday trading by 2020. The bill which has been passed in the lower house of Poland's parliament, restricts Sunday shopping to the first and last Sunday of the month until the end of 2018, to the last Sunday of the month in 2019, and bans Sunday shopping in 2020 (except on the Sundays before major holidays). It comes at the instigation of the trade unions.

"It is interesting that the move to abolish Sunday trading in Poland has come from the trade unions," according to Maria Steen from the pro-family think-tank The Iona Institute. "It is reported that the move is to allow workers to spend more time with their families."

This is something that Pope St John Paul II recognised in his apostolic letter *Dies Domini*, said Ms Steen, "the need not only for Christians to observe a day of worship and

As Poland votes to outlaw Sunday trading, Susan Gately wonders whether Ireland might follow suit



rest in accordance with their religious obligations, but also for members of civil society to have their need for the alternation between work and rest recognised by the State".

Years ago, the company known as Des Kelly Carpets, (now Des Kelly Interiors), decided to shut its doors on Sundays. Since the death of the company's founder, Des Kelly, in 2016, the practice has continued.

"We lost out at the start," Managing Director Greg Kelly told *The Irish Catholic*. "We were afraid of losing trade but Dad convinced us. 'We have loyal customers. What you

lose on Sunday you would get back throughout the rest of the week', was his attitude."

The principle became ingrained in his children, all eight of whom are involved in the business. "My Dad made it clear to the family never to open on Sundays. It is strictly a family day to be spent with your family. That's what it's all about, that and to go to church."

There is no demand coming from the company employees to reverse the rule, he says. "Our employees are delighted. We never looked back."

Dr Tom Healy, economist and director of the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) notes that very often people are more productive with shorter working hours. "Women who job share, for example, often get more into a half day than [another person gets into] 80% of a full time job."

"They get more done in four to five hours because they have to." He points out that countries with lower working hours (like Germany and Sweden) often have a higher productivity. "In these countries there is a great emphasis on work/life balance and participation in community."

“The more people continue shopping, the more we are generating an unsustainable pattern of living”

However, Dr Healy sees little likelihood of Irish sons following their Polish counterparts. "A lot of people are struggling to make up hours and pay, and Sunday trading is seen as a way to do this. Also, students and part-time workers use Sunday work to make up their hours. The current debate is like a lost battle," Dr Healy told *The Irish Catholic*.

Bishop of Limerick Dr Brendan Leahy agrees. "Is that door already bolted?" he asks. Poland is different to Ireland, he notes, with a huge



population of people going to Mass on Sundays, and the "quiet Sunday rhythm" of yesterday Ireland.

By contrast people in Ireland are in a "frenzy of activities" at weekends. "Weekends are becoming 'mini-weeks' with timetables, deadlines, projects to be achieved," according to Dr Leahy.

"I don't lament it completely but there is also the need for the 'Sabbath'. This biblical wisdom holds a deeper view of truth, that there is a need to break the cycle, to move to another type of being - rest, looking at

nature, with time for prayers, hospitality, visiting people and recreation. This is all part of a holistic approach to life."

From the wider societal point of view the idea of constant shopping and traffic affects community and family life, says Dr Healy.

“Family rituals are important... children benefit from rituals like dinners and going places together”

"The more people continue shopping, the more we

are generating an unsustainable pattern of living that is also detrimental to the environment. Shops being open 24/7 puts pressure on people to buy more," which in turn leads to the problem of having additional things for disposal.

Ms Steen, herself the mother of four primary school children, says families have a need for "rest and renewal".

"Parents work hard to be able to afford a home and decent standard of living for themselves and their children; however the price is often that they spend less and less time together as a family."

"Family rituals are important," says Mary Johnston, specialist in Counselling at Accord, the Church's marriage advisory service. "Children benefit from rituals like dinners and going places together." In the society in which we live, this may not be on a Sunday but, in any case "people need to make the best of the time they are together. It is not a question of quantity, it is all about quality."



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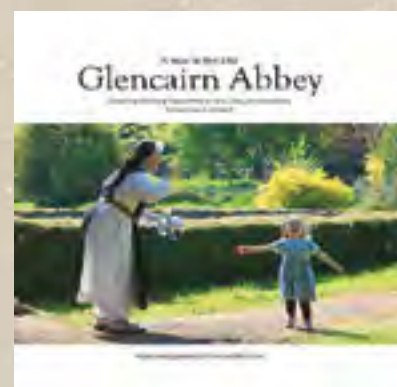
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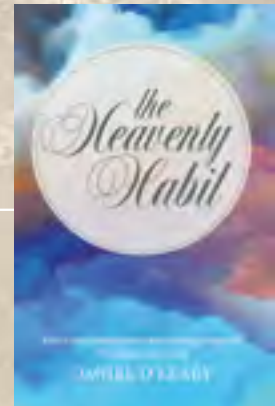


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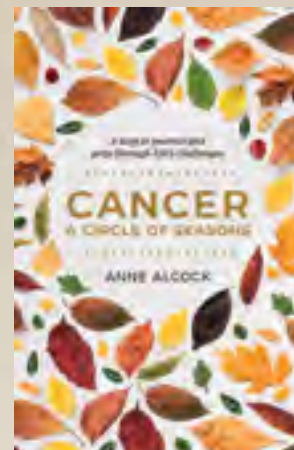
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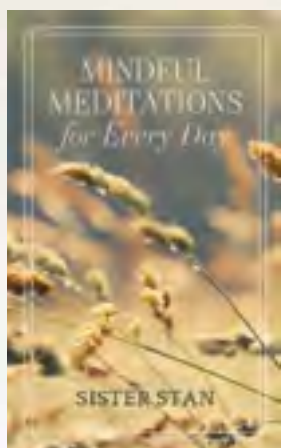
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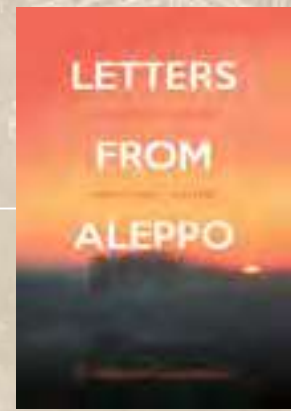
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Pope excels amid delicate politics and conflict zones



Pope Francis greets young people after celebrating Mass with youths on November 30 at St Mary's Cathedral in Yangon, Myanmar.

After what can only be described as a hugely successful Papal trip, there was definitely a collective exhalation from organisers and governments alike as Pope Francis stepped onto his plane back to Rome after delivering his messages of peace and unity.

This was no run-of-the-mill trip, especially considering it was the first time any Pope travelled to Myanmar, and only the second time to Bangladesh.

Many international media organisations staunchly shadowed the visit, even those who would not normally have given Papal trips much coverage. Without a doubt the plight of the Rohingya people, who are not recognised as a unique ethnicity under Myanmar law and have been given limited citizenship rights for decades, are the reason.

After several public events in Myanmar it became clear that the Pontiff would not say the word 'Rohingya' dur-

Definitely a Papal visit for the history books, writes Chai Brady



ing his time in the country. Myanmar's top prelate Cardinal Charles Maung Bo had advised him not to, saying it would spark violence as the majority of the Myanmar people view the mainly Muslim Rohingya as illegal Bangladeshi migrants.

After an insurgent group who associate themselves with the Rohingya attacked dozens of police posts in Rakhine State in late August a brutal military crackdown led to the displacement of over 600,000 people to Bangladesh, many of whom now live in squalid conditions in refugee camps in Cox's Bazaar.

The United Nations has accused the country's military of ethnic cleansing, and there are many reports

and evidence of horrific violence perpetrated by soldiers against civilians.

However, this journalist, after spending over two weeks in Myanmar, did not find one Myanmar person, journalist or otherwise, who disagreed with the military's actions in Rakhine State, meaning the Pope could be fighting an uphill battle.

The Holy Father has used the term several times in the past – even referring to the embattled people as "brothers and sisters" – and later went on to say 'Rohingya' in his Bangladesh leg of the trip, during his visit to refugees who fled violence in Myanmar.

While returning from Bangladesh in his plane, which is affectionately called

'Shepherd One', the Pope was asked by a journalist why he had not used the term in Myanmar.

Translated from Italian, he said: "Your question is interesting because it brings me to reflect on how I seek to communicate. For me, the most important thing is that the message arrives and for this I seek to say the things, step by step, and listen to the answers..."

“The Pope later went on to say 'Rohingya' in his Bangladesh leg of the trip”

The Pontiff continued saying that if he had used the word in Myanmar he would have caused a door to shut, and would have been unable to communicate his messages affectively.

From the beginning of his visit the Pope spoke of giving all people, of all ethnicities, dignity. His trip began in the early afternoon of November 27, when he touched down in Yangon International Airport in Myanmar. He was greeted

by thousands of Christians as well as 200 children from parishes in Yangon who sang *Viva el Papa*, some of which were wearing traditional clothing.

People wore white t-shirts to celebrate Francis' visit, which bore pictures of a white dove symbolising peace from within a heart drawn in the colours of Myanmar's flag. Inside the heart there is an outline of the country's landmass beside a picture of the Pope. There were huge billboards and signs everywhere with his image which read: 'A Heartiest Welcome to the Holy Father Pope Francis, Missionary of Love and Peace'.

The country's hierarchy is made up of 20 bishops with 800 priests, 2,400 sisters and 400 seminarians spread across 16 dioceses. According to Vatican figures there are fewer than 700,000 Catholics in Myanmar – about 1.4% of the population.

A meeting with one of Myanmar's generals was originally scheduled for Tuesday, but at the last minute there was a request to change it to the day of the

Pope's arrival. The Pontiff described it as a good and civilised meeting, but when asked by a journalist on the Papal plane on December 2 whether he thought it was the military trying to assert their dominance (the Pope was scheduled to meet Aung San Suu Kyi first), he said that could be a suspicion.

The meeting with commander-in-chief Senior General Min Aung Hlaing was pushed forward allegedly because of his commitments to go to China.

Balance

There is currently a precarious balance of power between the military and de facto leader State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, as the military still have control over certain issues such as national security.

The generals gained power after a coup d'état in 1962, which saw decades of corruption and violence under the military Junta, especially when quelling anti-government demonstrations. They recently ceded power, and more recently Suu Kyi's

» Continued on Page 22

A visit for the history books as Pope Francis excels

» Continued from Page 21

party, the National League for Democracy, won a landslide majority in Myanmar's parliament in 2015.

On Tuesday, November 28, Pope Francis flew to the Myanmar's new capital Naypyidaw, and had meetings with president Htin Kyaw and Aung San Suu Kyi.

Once again he was met by thousands of Christians flying Vatican flags and wearing their Papal-trip-themed t-shirts, many of whom had travelled hundreds of miles to see him at the airport, despite the intense heat of 32 degree heat.

Pope Francis and Suu Kyi spoke together at the International Convention Centre 2 (MCC-2) that evening, with the Pope spreading a message of unity and inter-religious dialogue.

“I know that many in Myanmar bear the wounds of violence, wounds both visible and invisible”

“The future of Myanmar must be peace, a peace based on respect for the dignity and rights of each member of society, and respect for each ethnic group and its identity, respect for the rule of law and respect for a democratic order that enables each individual and every group – none excluded – to offer its legitimate contribution to the common good,” he said.

In relation to interreligious dialogue he said that in the “great work of national reconciliation and integration” Myanmar's religious communities have a privileged role to play, as religious differences need not be a source of division and trust, but a force for unity, forgiveness, tolerance and wise nation building.

He then flew back to Yangon, and the next morning celebrated Mass in the Kyaikkasan Ground, which was the biggest public event during the Papal trip.

Hundreds of thousands of people arrived from remote villages and neighbouring countries to attend the mass, some even camping close to the venue the day before, and others arriving four or five hours before it officially began.

Although the Mass was scheduled for 9.30am, no one could get in after 7.30am due to huge demand; those who arrived late had to wait outside and watch monitors that were live streaming the event. The Kyaikkasan Ground

was created for horse racing when the country was ruled by Britain, and was used as a temporary detention centre during military rule. Now many different sports are played on its grounds.

In the first Papal Mass celebrated in Myanmar the Pope spoke of the country's wounds.

“I know that many in Myanmar bear the wounds of violence, wounds both visible and invisible. The temptation is to respond to these injuries with a worldly wisdom that... is deeply flawed. We think that healing can come from anger and revenge. Yet the way of revenge is not the way of Jesus,” he said.

“Jesus' way is radically different. When hatred and rejection led him to his passion and death, he responded with forgiveness and compassion.”

He added that he was aware the Church in Myanmar is already “doing much to bring the healing balm of God's mercy to others, especially those most in need”.

Following the Mass he met with the Supreme ‘Sangha’ Council of Buddhists and said it was an important occasion to strengthen the ties between Buddhists and Catholics.

The Buddhist monks and the Pope with his bishops sat in lines facing one another, with more clergy seated behind each group.

In his address the Pope said the event “is also an opportunity to affirm a commitment to peace, respect for human dignity and justice for every man and woman”.

In an age of great technological progress where people are increasingly aware of their common humanity and destiny, the Pope added, “the wounds of conflict, poverty and oppression persists, and create new divisions”.

He expressed the need for the religious community to help people recognise their common humanity, a statement which appears to be aimed at factions of radical Buddhist monks who have been known to preach intolerance and even violence towards people, particularly Muslims in Rakhine State. They are called the Ma Ba Tha (the Patriotic Association of Myanmar).

They exchanged gifts, with the Pope receiving a painting of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon and the Buddhists receiving a sculpture of a white dove symbolising peace.

The Chairman of the Sangha, Bhaddanta Kumarabhivamsa said in his address: “We firmly believe that terrorism and extremism arise



Aung San Suu Kyi greets Pope Francis during a meeting with government authorities, members of civil society and the diplomatic corps in Naypyidaw.

from bad interpretations of the original teachings of religions, because some followers introduce amendments to the original teachings under the thrust of their own desires, instincts, fears and disappointments.”

After this the Pope met with the country's bishops' council.

The following day, Thursday November 30, was the last public event held in Myanmar, ‘a Mass with the youth’ held in St Mary's Cathedral in the morning.

“Several young people of different ethnicities gave readings during the Mass”

Once again anyone who didn't arrive hours before was not guaranteed entrance to the grounds of the cathedral, while all of about 1,000 seats inside the building were allocated.

Hundreds of people crushed against the closed gates as the Pope arrived, and people inside the grounds cried out and waved Vatican and Myanmar flags as he passed in the Popemobile.

There was a huge number of young Catholics in attend-

ance, many from diocesan youth ministries.

During his homily Francis encouraged young people to be missionaries, saying that “as messengers of this good news, you are ready to bring a word of hope to the Church, to your own country, and to the wider world”.

“You are ready to bring good news for your suffering brothers and sisters who need your prayers and your solidarity, but also your enthusiasm for human rights, for justice and for the growth of that ‘love and peace’ which Jesus brings.”

Several young people of different ethnicities and in very different but beautiful traditional dress gave readings during the Mass. There are 135 recognised ethnicities in Myanmar, which has been a source of division and conflict, but also of rich cultural diversity.

After an official farewell Pope Francis arrived in Dhaka International Airport in Bangladesh in the afternoon.

There was no respite from the heat as the temperatures in Bangladesh showed no signs of differing from Myanmar, at a roasting 30°C.

Pope Francis first visited and placed a flora wreath at the Monument of Martyrs of Savar, which was erected in



Pope Francis rides in a rickshaw as he arrives for an interreligious

memory of those who fought for independence from Pakistan in 1971 during the ‘War of Liberation’. Civil authorities and a guard of honour were present.

Diplomatic corps

The Pontiff also signed the Book of Honour and planted a tree in the ‘Garden of Peace’ before going to the Commemorative Museum of Bangladesh to pay homage to the ‘Father of the Nation’ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was assassinated in 1975. Francis was received by members of Rahman's family.

Mujibur Rahman is the father of the present Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, known popularly as “Bangabandhu” or friend of the Bengalis.

Later that day during a meeting with authorities, civil society and the diplomatic corps he commended Bangladesh for its work helping Rohingya refugees, saying: “In recent months, the spirit of generosity and solidarity which is a distinguishing mark of Bangladeshi society has been seen most vividly in its humanitarian outreach to a massive influx of refugees from Rakhine State, providing them with temporary shelter and the basic necessities of life,” he said.

“This has been done at no little sacrifice. It has also been done before the eyes of the whole world.”

Although Aung San Suu Kyi signed a Memorandum of Understanding with officials in Bangladesh, which aims to begin the repatriation of refugees to Myanmar, there has been no time frame established.

The Pope called the international community to action, saying: “It is imperative that the international community take decisive measures to address this grave crisis, not only by working to resolve the political issues that have led to the mass displacement of people, but also by offering immediate material assistance to Bangladesh in its effort to respond effectively to urgent human needs.”

The following day, Friday December 1, the Holy Father celebrated Mass and ordained 16 men to the priesthood in Suhrawardy Udyan Park.

He gave words of encouragement and exhortation for the newly ordained priests, and asked them to work closely with their bishops.

Pope Francis then met the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for a 20-minute private meeting, and then with the bishops of Bangladesh in a home for elderly priests. In the

admist delicate politics



and ecumenical meeting for peace in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

meeting he asked for them to show "greater pastoral closeness to the lay faithful".

He said: "There is a need to promote their effective participation in the life of your particular Churches, not least through the canonical structures that provide for their voices to be heard and their experiences acknowledged. Recognise and value the charisms of lay men and women, and encourage them to put their gifts at the service of the Church and of society as a whole."

.....

Probably one of the most stark and memorable moments in the Pope's visit to Asia was during an interreligious ecumenical meeting for peace



A woman attends Pope Francis' celebration of Mass and the ordination of priests in Suhrawardy Udyan Park in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

in the garden of the Archbishop's house where he met 16 Rohingya people: 12 men, two women and two girls.

He said: "The presence of God today is also called Rohingya," and listened to each of them and blessed them.

The Pope asked for forgiveness for what happened to the persecuted people, saying: "In the name of everyone, of those who have persecuted you, of those who have done you harm, above all for the indifference of the world, I ask forgiveness. Forgiveness."

Although there's "little we can do because your tragedy is very hard and great", he told them "we give you space in the heart."

On the Papal plane, Pope

Francis admitted that at that point he had cried, he said: "In that moment I cried. I tried not to let it be seen. They cried, too."

On the final day of his visit, December 2, he went privately to a home founded by Mother Teresa for orphans, unwed mothers and the destitute elderly.

He then threw away an eight-page speech he prepared during a meeting with priests, religious and consecrated men and women, seminarians and novices in the Church of the Holy Rosary, saying he didn't want them to be bored. Instead, he said he would speak from the heart, saying that vocation is like a seed. He said that vocation is looked after with human tenderness in communities, where priests live and in parishes, and that if there is none the plant can dry out.

"Look after it with tenderness, because every brother in the presbyterate, in the episcopal conference, every religious in community, every brother seminarian, is a seed of God. And God looks at them with the tenderness of a father," he said.

“In that moment I cried. I tried not to let it be seen. They cried, too”

His last meeting was with young Bangladeshis in the Notre Dame College of Dhaka. He urged them to reject the false promises of happiness and go out of their self-centeredness to foster an environment of harmony, reaching out to others.

Commending Bangladesh's respect for the elderly, the Pope urged them to talk to their parents and grandparents, without playing with their phones the whole day, ignoring everything around them.

As the Pontiff was on his journey home on Shepherd One, he spoke a lot more candidly about certain issues, even saying that he heard from 'someone' that Rakhine state is rich in precious stones, and that "possibly there are interests" in displacing people.

There have also been similar theories in relation to conflict in Kachin State, in the north of Myanmar, which has been blamed on religious divides between Christians and Buddhists.

Although there is no hard evidence, when the Pope makes such statements, there may be more to it.

Pope Francis arrived back in Rome late at night last Saturday, after a Papal trip destined for the history books.



(l-r) James Sengdenmyo, Khui Shin and Peter Bellman from Kachin State, and from France, Marie, Camilla Errarda (Lyon) and Romain Delenda (Paris).

Faithful welcome Pope's message of peace

There is a resounding belief that the Pope's message of peace in Myanmar will make a difference in the country among those who attended the Papal trip.

Robert Taylor, from England, attended the Kyaikkasan Grounds Mass and the Mass for youth at St Mary's Cathedral. Travelling with his wife Rachel and three-year-old daughter Beth, he said it had been "fantastic".

"I think it's the perfect time for him to come and to have Mass with that many people in this country, I think it's fantastic and a real sense of peace came during Mass," he said.

"The Burmese are a very peaceful people, I think they are encouraged to be, everyone is very friendly and very kind, they go out of their way to help you out. Especially at the event yesterday at the Mass (Kyaikkasan Grounds), the Catholics there from across the world – a lot from Asia – were very kind and a lot could communicate in some way in English which was helpful." Mr Taylor said they arrived at 6am and watched the sun rise.

"Where we were we had priests to one side and nuns behind us, they opened the gates at one stage because where the sisters where it was proper empty, so they opened the gates for the locals who had been walking for miles, and they all came running in all happy and filled the whole area up."

Experience

From Kachin State over 1,000km away, James Sengdenmyo and his friends Khui Shin and Peter Bellman made the journey to attend both Masses over two days.

Mr Sengdenmyo said: "We're very happy for him to



Robert, Rachel and Beth (3) Taylor from England.



David Rafael Hla Shwe with wife Theresa and one-year-old grandchild, George.

visit Yangon, this is the first experience for me, I have never seen the Pope, this is the first time. We are very proud and happy. He will bring peace, he will pray for us."

David Rafael Hla Shwe travelled with his wife Theresa and grandson George (1) to the Mass for youth, he said: "We are very very happy to be here, the whole of the Burmese are happy. He will bring peace to our country."

Fr Carlo Velardo, an Italian missionary who has worked for 40 years in Thailand, travelled to Myanmar for the Papal trip.

Speaking about the

importance of the Pontiff's visit he said: "We have to remember who the Pope is, the Pope is a pastor, as a good pastor he wants to take care of his flock, and part of his flock are in Myanmar. Although it is a little flock in a big country, all the same it's part of the universal church so it's the duty of a pastor to go to see his flock wherever they are."

Dangerous

Fr Velardo added that this was especially important when people are in a situation that might be troublesome or even dangerous "the Pope comes here, as the gospel says, to confirm in the Faith those who are believers".

"The people of Myanmar, the Catholics, they show they want to have peace in the country by works of mercy, the unity among themselves, the witness they give, and the things they do for others. The Catholic Church in Myanmar is very much involved in social work for uplifting the lives of the people here in every situation regardless of religion, ethnic population, even languages," he added.

Letters

Post to: Letters to the Editor, The Irish Catholic,
23 Merrion Square North, Dublin 2,
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Letter of the week

Move on holidays would be a cave in to secularism

Dear Editor, I have noted your piece on the proposal to relocate some holydays to the nearest Sunday, that of All Saints on November 1 and that of the Immaculate Conception on December 8 (IC 16/11/17). I would see that as one more instance of an ongoing cave in or sell out to secularism. Furthermore, when holydays are gone, Sundays go soon after in practice as we see happening already in the way people use that day for work and shopping.

That the holydays are not being observed in a country which is more than 80% Catholic is indeed a scandal.

It shows how much Our Lady and the saints mean to most of these Catholics in practice when they won't take a day off to honour them but will gladly do so when the State or the banks call a holiday.

The solution I propose is that priests, in unison, preach the meaning of these holydays and also the obligation that there is on Catholics to observe them, an obligation which traditionally was said to bind under pain of mortal sin. But then, the words 'sin' and 'obligation' have gone out of fashion for many years

now. This, I believe, is due to a false sense of 'pastoral sensitivity' which does not want to ruffle the feathers of cosy Catholics, in this case those in business and their customers, lest they be offended or lose profit. So, to say nothing (other than some pious platitudes) and let the sell out roll on seems to be the rule and everyone is happy. But I wonder if Our Lady and the saints are happy with that?

*Yours etc.,
Fr Richard O'Connor,
Rome, Italy.*

Vast majority of children have smooth transition from care

Dear Editor, I read Chai Brady's article - 'Children leaving State care face immediate homelessness' (IC 9/11/17) with interest. It is a tragedy for any young person to be homeless. Young people leaving State care need additional supports, and a minority have specific challenges.

Children and young people admitted to care who have had life experiences characterised by neglect or child abuse can suffer from long-term emotional and physical wellbeing impairment as a result. As indicated in the article, a significant percentage - in

some cases 40% or 50% of users of the specialised support services named (Focus Ireland, Merchants Quay Ireland and the Peter McVerry Trust) have formerly lived in care, and of course will be vulnerable to being homeless. The services mentioned are to be commended for the valuable support they provide to this vulnerable group.

Your readers may be interested to learn more about the general situation for young people leaving State care. In the age range of young people outlined in the article, 18 to 25 years, between 2,400 to 3,000

young people left care at age 18. The vast majority of children in care live with foster families, so it is heartening to know that 47% of care leavers, in receipt of an aftercare service remain living with their foster carers, while 21% live independently.

Some 11% had returned home and 7% were either in a residential centre or in supported lodgings. Bearing in mind that the desire of young people to live independently or to return home may not always work out, the recently introduced legislation for Aftercare welcomes young people who

were in care to come back to Tusla to seek supports until they are 21 years of age.

It is worthwhile remembering that many young people leaving care make the transition from childhood into their adult lives successfully, with the support and training they need. Homelessness, or the threat of homelessness, is not a prospect or an outcome for the majority of young people leaving care.

*Yours etc.,
Alan Breen,
Head of Communications,
Tusla Child and Family
Support Agency,
Dublin 8.*

Mass should have sacral language

Dear Editor, I was delighted to read in your newspaper that the Irish bishops' conference have no plans to change the translation of the Mass (IC 30/11/17).

The current translation of the Mass is very faithful to the Latin original and captures the importance of using sacral language for the worship of God. For too long the people of God have had to put up with bizarre distortions where the priest tries to turn himself into a performer rather than concentrating the hearts and minds of the faithful on the things that are of God.

*Yours etc.,
Mary Moloney,
Sligo, Co. Sligo.*



We should follow the 'Prince of Peace' on his path

Dear Editor, I must take issue with your recent correspondent concerning the "just war" teaching (IC 30/11/17). I hope that Pope Francis does change this teaching. I feel that war is inherently unjust; it rains down death and destruction on soldiers and civilians, the good and bad, the innocent and the guilty, badness and guilt being very much in the eye of the beholder.

My attitude comes from Scripture, namely "Thou shalt not kill", "Blessed

are the peacemakers", "Turn the other cheek", "Do not resist the evildoer". How much of the current teaching is down to the Church having become too close to the state in the past with a consequent requirement to support the state's wars?

Non-violent resistance does work. Note, for instance, the success of Mahatma Gandhi and Rev. Martin Luther King; the peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy;

the largely-peaceful overthrow of communism; the heroic resistance of Denmark to the Nazi tyranny which saved the lives of Danish Jews, to mention just a few.

Surely if we call Jesus the 'Prince of Peace' we should follow him in that path.

*Yours etc.,
Michael Daly,
Clonsilla, Dublin 15.*

A return to Latin should be on the cards

Dear Editor, Now that the bishops have decided that they will not give up the new translation of the Mass in English (IC 30/11/17) it is time for them to take seriously the traditional form of the Mass. If one goes to the trouble of attending the Extraordinary Form of the Mass at the many churches where it is offered in Ireland, one will immediately be struck by the number of young people - including young families - who choose to attend. This should provide food for thought and priests and bishops should surely be promoting this form of worship.

It is not unrealistic to hope for a day when the liturgy will be restored to its former glory and the entire Church will be united again in the great act of worship offering the Mass with one voice using the Latin tongue.

*Yours etc.,
Peter Murphy,
Drogheda, Co. Louth.*

Don't forget the brothers!

Dear Editor, I was happy to read in your paper a brief book review, *Good Seed, Fertile Soil, Religious Vocations in Limerick* by Peter Costello (IC 23/11/17). He states for the author, a Presentation Brother, it is a work of love for the past of Limerick Diocese, with brief biographies of priests and nuns who worked there. However, he omitted to recognise and acknowledge the work of many brothers from different congregations who worked both locally and on the missions overseas. Bro. J.M. Feheney himself being one of them.

*Yours etc.,
Bro. Rupert O'Sullivan,
Presentation Brothers Province Leadership Team,
Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin.*

Time for a creative answer to rough sleeping

Dear Editor, as we all know there are many people sleeping rough at night under cold, wet and unsafe conditions in our cities. As we approach the celebration of the birth of Jesus who also had to sleep in rough accommodation along with Mary and Joseph it's time for some practical action: why not accommodate these people overnight in our major railway stations which at least are dry and have toilet facilities?

It would also make it easier for those great volunteers who do nightly soup runs to help our fellow Christians.

These railway stations also have catering facilities open every morning so these rough sleepers could be given a voucher for a hot breakfast.

Obviously one would need to hire some security personnel overnight to ensure the safety of these guests.

Irish Rail also have lots of empty carriages no longer in use which could be adapted for sleeping, parked at designated stations and used to accommodate people overnight.

Volunteers could come in once a week to clean and refresh these carriages at no cost to Irish Rail or the State.

Rough sleepers in return could be asked to vacate these stations by 8am and not to beg inside the stations from commuters.

*Yours etc.,
Liam de Paor,
Carrickane, Co. Cavan.*

Letters to the Editor

All letters should include the writer's full name, postal address and telephone numbers (day and evening). Letter writers may receive a subsequent telephone call from *The Irish Catholic* as part of our authentication process which does not amount to a commitment to publish.

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication date, acknowledge unpublished letters or discuss the

merits of letters. We do not publish pseudonyms or other formulae to conceal the writer's identity, such as "name and address with editor". We do not print letters addressed to someone else, open letters, or verse. Letters to the Editor should only be sent to *The Irish Catholic*, and not other publications. Letters should not exceed 300 words and may be shortened for space requirements.

📷 Around the world



HUNGARY: People stand near an Advent wreath outside St Stephen's Basilica in Budapest. Photos: CNS



VATICAN: Pope Francis waves during his Angelus in St Peter's Square at the Vatican. Advent is a time to be watchful and alert to the ways one strays from God's path, but also to signs of his presence in other people and in the beauty of the world he said.



KENYA: A child prays with the Legio Maria sect in Kisumu. Some Catholics have left the church for the sect.



US: Visitors hold candles during a World AIDS Day gathering at the Las Memorias AIDS Monument in Los Angeles. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services released a joint letter that same day acknowledging the great strides made regarding the AIDS epidemic but also the need to maintain funding.



US: Priests from across Arizona and visiting priests from Kansas and Oklahoma line up outside the Cathedral of St Augustine in Tucson, Arizona, prior to the installation Mass for Bishop Edward Weisenburger as bishop of Tucson.



BANGLADESH: A Rohingya woman who says she was beaten and burned by soldiers in Myanmar poses for a photograph at a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar.

Reticence and secrecy as virtue



In all healthy people there's a natural reticence about revealing too much of themselves and a concomitant need to keep certain things secret. Too often we judge this as an unhealthy shyness or, worse, as hiding something bad. But reticence and secrecy can be as much virtue as fault because, as James Hillman puts it, when we're healthy we will normally "show the piety of shame before the mystery of life".

When are secrets healthy and when are they not? When is it healthy to 'cast our pearl' before others and when is it not? This is often answered too simplistically on both sides.

“Just as it can be bad to keep secrets, we can also be too loose in sharing ourselves. We can lack proper reticence”

No doubt secrets can be dangerous. From scripture, from spirituality in every tradition, from what's best in psychology, and, not least, from the various '12-Step Programs' that today help so many people back to health, we learn that keeping secrets can be dangerous, that what's dark, obsessive and hidden within us has to be brought to light, confessed, shared with someone, and owned in openness or we can never be



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

healthy.

Scripture tells us that the truth will set us free, that we will be healthy only if we confess our sins, and that our dark secrets will fester in us and ultimately corrupt us if we keep them hidden.

Alcoholics Anonymous submits that we are as sick as our sickest secret. Psychology tells us that our psychic health depends upon our capacity to share our thoughts, feelings, and failings openly with others and that it's dangerous to keep things bottled up inside ourselves. That's right. That's wise.

Dark secrets

There are secrets that are wrongly kept, like the dark secrets we keep when we betray or the secrets a young child clutches to as an exercise in power. Such secrets fester in the soul and keep us wrongly apart. What's hidden must be brought into the light. We should be wary of secrets.

But, as is the case with almost everything else, there's another side to this, a delicate balance that needs to be struck. Just as it can be bad to keep secrets, we can also be too loose in sharing ourselves. We can lack proper reticence. We can trivialise what's precious inside us. We can open ourselves in ways that takes away our mystery and makes

us inept subjects for romance. We can lose our depth in ways that make it difficult for us to be creative or to pray. We can lack "the piety of shame before the mystery of life". We all need to keep some secrets.

Etymologically to keep a secret means to keep something apart from others. And we need to do that in healthy ways because a certain amount of honest privacy is necessary for us to nurture our individuality, for us to come to know our own souls.

All of us need to keep some secrets, healthy secrets. What this does, apart from helping us know more deeply our individuality, is protect our mystery and depth by shielding them under a certain mystique, from which we can more richly offer our individuality to others.

We derive both the words mystery and mystic from the Greek word *myein* which is a word that's used to describe what we are left looking at when a flower closes its petals or a person closes his or her eyelids. Something's hidden then, something of beauty, of intelligence, of wit, of love. Its depths are partially closed off and so that individual flower or person takes on a certain mystique which triggers a desire within us to want to uncover those depths.



Romance has its origins here, as does creativity, prayer and contemplation. It's no accident that when artists paint persons at prayer normally they are depicted with their eyelids closed.

“Jesus warns us to not give to the dogs what's sacred or throw pearls to swine”

Our souls need to be protected from over-exposure. Just as our eyes need to be closed at times for sleep, so too our souls. They need time away from the maddening crowd, time alone with themselves, time to healthily deepen their individuality so as to make them richer for romance.

Some years ago in an American TV sitcom, a mother issued this warning to her teenage daughter

just as this young person was leaving for a party with friends: "Now remember your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit – not a public amusement park!"

Inside that wit, there's wisdom. The mother's warning is about properly guarding one's body, but the body is connected to the soul and, like the body, the soul too shouldn't be trivialised and become fodder for recreation.

Jesus warns us to not give to the dogs what's sacred or throw pearls to swine. That's strong talk, but what he's warning us about merits strong language. Soul is a precious commodity that needs to be properly cherished and guarded. Soul is also a sacred commodity that needs to be accorded its proper reverence. We protect that preciousness and sacredness when we confess openly our sick secrets and then properly guard our healthy ones.

Family & Lifestyle

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The myth of an ideal Christmas



Christmas often evokes nostalgic and warm memories of peace, love and thanksgiving, yet for many families in Ireland, it can be one of the most difficult and painful times of the year.

Family tensions, such as violent disputes among siblings, uneasiness with extended family and parental stress, can reduce the family home to a prison during the holiday period.

Although the reasons for this strain can vary, one study carried out in the University of West Virginia has shown that arguments among families are a result of a condition called 'hypercopresence'.

Sharing a small space for an extended period of time, which



Colm Fitzpatrick
explores the stress
behind closed doors
this Christmas

occurs across family homes during the Christmas holidays, creates a heightened sense of pressure.

By being forced to interact with other family members, including the sharing of facilities like bedrooms and bathrooms, with little control over the situation, unwanted outbursts may ensue.

Although this is a common reality for many families at

Christmas, there are little to no support networks to cope with the problem.

"People don't have the usual supports at Christmas," explains Bridget Sweeney, a counsellor from the Access Counselling Clinic, Dublin. "Who is available on Christmas day? Most services are closed."

She adds that many families have unrealistic expectations at Christmas, as they feel that

everyone else is having a "great time", but in truth, it's rarely ever that straightforward for families during the Christmas period.

This can be exacerbated by the misuse of alcohol which impairs decision making, resulting in arguments, fights and even abuse. Last year, over 1,000 children in Ireland rang ChildLine with alcohol abuse cited as one of the main factors.

This statistic reveals the damaging effects alcohol can play in the family context, which when misused transforms merriment into hostility. For some families this Christmas, removing alcohol may be the best way to prevent quarrelling.

It also important to take into consideration physical fragility

at Christmas, as the cold and flu season will inevitably affect health and mood. By providing a warm and comfortable household for the family to be together, with medicine available, these physical illnesses can be combated, and reduce the chances of conflict arising.

Tension

But tension at Christmas can't be simply reduced down seeing your siblings too much, alcohol abuse or the weather; often the issues are much deeper. In many cases, travelling home can elicit unhappy memories such as a bad childhood or the death of a family member. These negative associations can affect temper

» **Continued on Page 29**

Family News

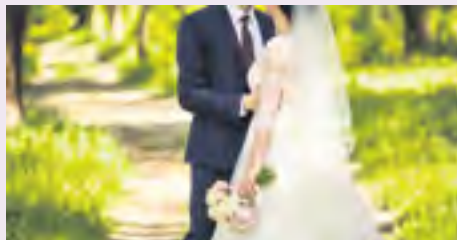
AND EVENTS

Skating away the holiday in Wonderland

Christmas Wonderland in City West offers an unusual family day out over the festive period, with an 800 sqm ice rink complete with little penguins, special children's skating area and twinkling Christmas lights.

Other seasonal ice rinks open this month include Galway Skates in Salthill, Killarney on Ice and in Belfast, Ireland's only Olympic sized ice rink in the Dundonald International Ice Bowl.

Ice Skating is becoming more and more popular in Ireland and new ice skating rinks are opening up all around the country offering ice skating, ice dancing and even ice hockey for all ages. Most open only over the holiday period, but any families who catch the skating bug over the Christmas can skate all year round at rinks in Belfast, Cork, Dublin, Galway.



MARRIAGE – AN UNLIKELY BLESSING: Marriage's benefits are hardly something *The Irish Catholic* has skimmed on extolling in the past, but one thing perhaps neglected in these pages is how it may lower the risks of developing dementia.

A study of worldwide studies suggests that single people are between 24% and 42% more likely to develop dementia than married people. The survey, published in the *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry*, suggested that the risk difference might be partially explained by single people having poorer physical health than their married peers.

Widowed people also seem to have higher rates of dementia, which may be linked to increased stress levels. It is thought that couples have more opportunities for social engagement than single people, with social interaction already established as being linked to lower dementia rates and better health in general.

Moving crib is still a moving experience

It's been less than two months since Dublin's much loved Moving Crib almost went up in flames, but the blaze at the St Martin Apostolate on Parnell Square was suitably tackled and the crib is open again for its 61st Christmas.

Open from 2pm to 6pm Monday to Friday, and from 11am to 6pm on weekends, the crib is one of Dublin's most popular free attractions over the Christmas period – though groups are urged to book.

Featuring over 100 handcrafted metre-high figures, the crib doesn't just feature the Nativity – though everything in it builds towards that. Rather, its tableaux start with Adam and Eve and takes in such other tales from Salvation history as Noah's Ark, all leading up to the birth of Christ.

Children should bring along a leaf with them, drawn, coloured in, and cut out, with their name on the back to add to the Garden of Eden. There could be a prize in it!



Treasuring Advent's simple pleasures

My late father never got into too much of a fuss about Christmas. While the rest of us were dashing around like headless chickens, he always seemed to be his usual serene self. Whether his Christmas presents cost the earth or the offering was just a humble pair of socks or a scarf, his reaction was fairly similar.

In fact, it was often the small quirky gifts that captured his imagination; he was very pleased one year with a brimmed hat that served him well for many years. Another year he was delighted with a little breakfast set that one of the grandchildren gave him. When we were small children, he loved our handmade cards and would gather them up and put them away safely as if they were precious jewels.

Temptation

As we head into the last few weeks before Christmas, the temptation is to make it all about the outward trappings of the season while it's often the simple things that matter the most. Ever year, I make a firm resolution not to feel pressured into doing more and spending more and to give my children a great example of how Christ should be at the centre of Christmas. It can be a bit of a battle. While browsing on the internet for Christmas resources, I was highly impressed with the Ossory Diocese Resources for Advent 2017 put in place by their Adult Faith Development Group.

In this era of instant entertainment and easy internet access, parishes need to be competitive and offer a variety of resources that appeal to all age groups. Families, who want

A parent's perspective



Maria Byrne

Christmas to involve a bit more than investing in the Christmas jumpers and decking the halls with boughs of holly, can get great ideas on this website.

I particularly liked the idea of the Advent Tweet Daily Thought where each day a short film will be tweeted with a simple reflection, prayer or thought for that day. The Advent Text of the Day is equally appealing with messages being delivered that aim to encourage the receiver to reflect for a few minutes or to pause to say a short prayer.

I could really see teenagers and young adults signing up for this. I think that, as parents and educators, we have to hold on to the old traditions, but not be afraid to embrace new ways of

Confirmation parent retreats. Many parents can feel a bit out of touch with what's going on in the school or may have drifted away from the faith. The plan to hold short mini-retreats for parents is something that really interests me and what better time than during Advent. Parents need support as much as children and the chat, advice and interaction with other parents is invaluable.

Other exciting aspects of ossory.ie were the free resources for parishes which include a step-by-step guide to building an Advent wreath and explaining its significance and symbolism, and a simple blessing for the family crib.

“One old favourite that has charmed generations of children is the Moving Crib in St Martin's Apostolate”

There's also a reprinting of the Christmas story and Christmas Grace prayer cards which encourage families to take a moment to say a grace before meals on Christmas Day. Grace is a great custom for every day of the year and one that the younger children love, often composing their own versions and woe betide any adult who even sniffs at a roast potato before the prayer is over.

Most families have their own Christmas customs and traditions like going to see the Christmas lights being turned on or a trip to bring the younger children to see Santa.

With Christmas radio and television stations and a huge focus on Christmas parties and

events, we can lose sight of the fact that Advent is actually a season of expectant waiting and preparation for the celebration of the arrival of Jesus.

Taking on some of the suggestions widely available on the various Catholic websites and Facebook pages draws one back to the true meaning of Christmas and helps families to prepare spiritually. For several years I've loved using the online Advent Calendar on the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference website.

I find that young and old enjoy opening the virtual doors and the content is excellent. This year the focus is on family as we prepare for next year's World Meeting of Families.

Christmas fairs

One old favourite that has charmed generations of children is the Moving Crib in St Martin's Apostolate, Parnell Square in Dublin. It's a few years since I've been there but it has a lovely old world atmosphere with more than 100 figures in 14 different tableaux.

It conveys the true meaning of Christmas in a unique and child friendly way. I'd really recommend it.

Every parish has annual Christmas fairs and carol services, many supporting various charities. Children are very eager to get involved if they're given the chance.

Whatever our commitments and no matter how busy and stressed out we are, our families need those few minutes every day of Advent to stop, be silent and prepare our hearts for the miracle of Christmas, to make room in the inn for the Saviour who is Christ the Lord.



preparing for the birth of Jesus.

I have two children for Communion and Confirmation next year and Advent is an excellent time to supplement their preparation for the celebration of these sacraments. I loved the Ossory site's mention of Communion and

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and possibly induce a depressive episode.

A more incisive reason for family tension is often due to toxic relatives, who may have never bonded well as children or are possibly engaging in an ongoing dispute. Using the example of a mother who intends on bringing her two quarrelling sons home for Christmas, Bridget provided some helpful advice as to how to handle the situation.

"Limits and balances need to be created before the chaos. The mother needs to establish boundaries", she says, adding that the mother should not take sides or become a referee.

"We have to decide what we will allow and what we won't allow. We don't have control over the brothers, but we do have control of our own power."

“An easier way to make sure squabbling adults can be hushed is by appealing to the presence of children”

Bridget explains that one of primary stresses of Christmas is the expectations we have for the day, which usually entails trying to constantly accommodate others, with problems arising when those expectations are not met.

"When we have expectations we are unhappy. Contentment is as good as it gets", she said.

At the lowest level during Christmas you have a group of individuals coming together whose basic needs must be met. This requires encouragement, trust, acceptance and negotiation and from these foundations tensions can enter the process of amelioration.

Preparation

"The key in any situation is preparation. Decide beforehand what is going to happen and negotiate. Honour the commitment of the day.

"You can't live in conditions where there is anger or frustration. The family members have to make that choice. We all have ownership for responsibility and caring."

If you are aware beforehand of the issues that may cause strain on the day, make an attempt to try and solve the problem before the



family gathers, under reasonable terms, and with an acceptance that resolution may not be possible. If compromise and negotiation is absent in any of the parties involved, then make an appropriate decision in handling it, while staying in control of the situation.

This doesn't just apply to family disputes but also practical issues such as bedding or travel arrangements. By tackling these predicaments early on, there will be a better chance of a more wholesome, relaxing Christmas. Realising that perfection is only an ideal and one that it is impossible to attain, means that expectations can be lessened and compromises be made.

An easier way to make sure squabbling adults can be hushed is by appealing to the presence of children. In an attempt not to destroy this one-day year event for children, arguments will be quelled and bad habits stifled. Although this method is not the ideal way to address familial disputes, it does provide a short-term solution to an unexpected, abrupt quarrel.

Another reason as to why imbalance or strain at Christmas occurs is partly due to the loss of connection between family members over the year passed, which leads to uncomfortableness and guilt. This may reveal itself in the form of a son or daughter who is dismayed by the physical change of their parents, who have become older and more dependent. Similarly, parents may feel abandoned by children who rarely

visit, which can cause physical and mental damage. Bridget explains the reality of this situation.

"The real test of any human being is connection, and if we have gone away and disconnected, the mother will be in a frailer condition.

"The mother needs connection. Any contact is useful. The key message of Christmas is love: love of self and love of neighbour. This begins with the family and then community."

By continually interacting with family members, both parents and siblings, either personally or by phone throughout the year, the Christmas anxiety caused by isolation or exclusion can be alleviated, creating an environment of companionship and solidarity.

However, the best way to tackle Christmas stress this year, according to Bridget, depends entirely on ourselves and how we let events affect us. By recognising that we are the sole arbiters of our emotions and mental states, regardless of the situation, we can decide its impact on us.

“For Christians, Christmas is time to give thanks to the centrality and importance of the family”

"We have no control over these things and we can choose to be happy", she says. "We can choose not to allow these things to have an effect on us."

For Christians, Christmas is time to give thanks to the centrality and importance of the family. We look to the archetypal parents, Mary and Joseph, who supported one another with a trust in God when attempting to find a place to birth Jesus. In a similar way, it is important to remind ourselves that family life often encounters struggles. By creating a strong network of trust, through understanding, acceptance and forgiveness, families can take the first steps this year to transform a glum Christmas into a day celebrating togetherness.

❶ For more information about family counselling, see <http://www.accesscounselling.ie>

Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



Tell me a story about when you were a boy." That's the unchanging instruction I have received from my eight-year-old boy at bedtime for weeks now.

At first, I thought this was brought on by my father's colourful stories of his childhood in Ballyvaughan, where fact and fiction intermingle fantastically. One recent story was about how he and his friends saw a German bomber crash in the village during World War II – a story made all the more remarkable by the fact that my father was born in 1949.

It is the ordinary things about my boyhood that fascinate Seán. I show him photos of me at his age. We look very alike. There I am, with grass-stained knees from playing football, fishing from the rocks, walking in the woods or standing proudly in my beaver uniform. It must seem like a parallel universe, where a progenitor version of him was doing all the very same things he does now, just three decades ago. Perhaps he is pondering the fact that this giant in his life, his father, was once a very similar little boy, playing the same games and imagining the same things.



“The poorer boys always had crisps for lunch”

Each night I tell him another story of my happy childhood, and he goes to sleep contentedly. Once he is asleep, I sit by the fire. But in that rare peaceful hour, it is the things I don't tell him about life in 1980s Cork that come to mind. I remember the daily news reports of bombs, killings and paramilitary funerals in Northern Ireland. The phrase "tit for tat" was used to describe the cycle of vengeance, like some macabre childhood game played by shadowy figures.

I remember roadblocks and plain-clothes officers with Uzi machine guns. The men

who did these things moved in our midst. This grim backdrop to my childhood has made me all the more determined to insulate my kids from the current terror attacks. The evening news is not on in our house.

I remember learning the meaning of the word 'redundancy' when Ford and Dunlops closed, devastating Cork. My best friend emigrated to Australia and sent me lonely letters on thin airmail paper, featuring drawings of the lizards in his garden. Neighbours moved to America. A sense of desperation emanated from households as the family car was sold, holidays were cancelled and clothes became threadbare.

I remember proud men, with an emotional choke in their voices calling to the door, "I was wondering if there's any work you need done around the house missus, painting or gardening, as Christmas is coming and we need a few bob for presents."

I said to my mother that he didn't have to worry, Santa would bring his children presents.

Something in her reply caused me to doubt the theology of Santa, to which I had theretofore subscribed.

I remember a boy in my class crying as other boys were mocking his ill-fitting hand-knitted school jumper. I stepped in and said that hand-made jumpers were better than our shop-bought ones anyway, which had plastic in them, and they were warmer in winter too. He gave me some crisps for lunch. That was one of the mysteries: the poorer boys always had crisps for lunch.

I'll tell Seán these stories in time, but not yet. We parents are responsible for forming our children's fundamental first impressions of humanity, and the world. I believe that if their first deep impression is one of security and kindness, they will feel safer all their lives, and from that position of emotional strength can deal better, and more compassionately, with the many sorrows of the world.

Bringing the youth back to God

Youth Space



Imelda Hartnett gives an insight into the life of ministry

Most days I would wake up not knowing what the day ahead would look like. Every couple of mornings I would wake up in a different bed, a different house, heading off to a school I've never been to before. I never thought this unusual lifestyle would be how I would spend nine months of my past year when I was 19.

NET is a Catholic Non-profit Organization focused on Youth Ministry and inviting young people to learn, love and embrace the life of the Church. It is in several countries: Canada, Ireland, USA and Australia. I spent my time as a missionary on NET Canada.

Each NET shares the same mission and core values, but it works a little differently in each country, as obviously each country has a different cultural vision on what the ministry itself should look like.

Small groups

NET is an acronym – National Evangelisation Teams. There are travelling teams that go from place to place staying in different homes and families every couple of nights and there are local teams that stay in one location for a year and build relationships with people in the area.

On NET, there are teams of about seven to 12 people that go into schools and parishes and put on retreats for young people usually



NET members.



from the ages of 12-18.

A retreat day has talks, testimonies, dramas, activities and a time of small groups. This is where the kids have a chance to discuss, talk and reflect about the theme for the day or just talk about God in general with the small group leader, who is a member of the NET team.

We do our best to create an environment where people feel safe to share their opinions and beliefs without feeling judged or criticised. Towards the end of the day there is also a time of prayer, where they are invited to take time

to pray. Throughout the whole day we encourage the youth to participate in all the activities and things that go on but it is really up to them how much they want to participate. The idea is that they are welcome to join, not forced.

“There are people from all over with different stories”

There is usually a theme for the day too, whether it's a confirmation class then we focus on talking about the Holy Spirit or sometimes

if it's an older class we talk about why we have decided to put God in the center of our lives as opposed to not wanting Him in it. Often times these days, young people aren't encouraged or given an opportunity to experience time in prayer by other young people. At the retreat we get the chance to do that.

Obviously on the team, there are people from all over with completely different stories to share about how God has impacted their lives, which is what makes NET such a beautiful ministry. Young people on the teams share

the same core values and beliefs but come from completely different walks of life and wanting to share that with others.

I'm from Wicklow but decided to apply for NET Canada because I'd never been to anywhere outside of Europe, and Canada seemed like a beautiful place to go. Anyone who is between the ages of 18-30 can apply for NET in any country.

A lot of my friends were not sure what they wanted to study in University but were going anyway because they felt it was the only option they had or they were expected to straight out of 6th year, but I didn't really want to go to university before I was sure on what I wanted to study, so I decided to take a gap year and do NET.

I am so grateful for the time I served with NET Canada. The first time I heard of NET was when a team came to my school and put on a retreat for a class of students. I remember thinking how bizarre it was for young people to be spending their time going into schools and sharing their faith with others. I definitely was not living out a Catholic lifestyle as I grew up, except for going to mass on Sundays.

My favorite thing about being on NET was that I developed a personal relationship with Jesus through prayer, which I had never had before, and often wondered if it was really possible. Travelling and seeing so many beautiful places and wonderful people with nine other people who by the end of it, felt like my second family. I honestly have never experienced anything like that. On NET Canada alone, over 20,000 youth have the opportunity through our teams to experience and understand God. Last year of that number, 91% of youth said they felt closer to God as a result of the retreat they had with NET.

i For more information about NET, see <http://www.netusa.org/>



Green Fingers

Paul Gargan

Encourage more wildlife to visit your garden

As well as being a place that provides you with pleasure and peace, your garden should be a haven for a large variety of wildlife. From small mammals, birds and reptiles, to a huge range of beneficial insects and other invertebrates. By growing as wide a range of plants as possible, you will ensure that the widest range of wildlife will visit.

A planting that relies on one type of plant only – known as monoculture – (e.g. lawn) has the adverse effect of providing ideal conditions for certain pests and diseases to proliferate. A good balance of predators helps immeasurably in the control of a range of creatures that cause harm to plants. A plant that has been weakened by insect attack is more susceptible to attack by disease pathogens.

Stop using pesticides; they are for killing insects, both good and bad. It is far better to encourage the predators of problematic insects into your garden to control infestations, a long-

term solution, than to use pesticides, a short-term one. Insects, both problematic ones and their predators are food for birds, small mammals and reptiles.

To ensure good crops, be they flowers, fruits or vegetables, it is essential to encourage pollinating insects into your garden.

Pollinating insects

It is possible, even in the smallest of gardens, to make sure you have plants in flower throughout the year to attract pollinating insects. It is easy in spring/summer and to a lesser extent autumn, and still possible in winter if

you look to some of the winter-flowering shrubs such as *viburnum tinus*, *sarcococca humilis* and also early flowering bulbs such as snowdrops and crocuses. If you have space, keep an area of your garden uncultivated and allow nature plants

(weeds) to seed themselves there. Many are a valuable food source for insects.

Bees prefer plants with single flowers because pollen grains are more accessible, such as sedum and monarda. Butterflies are attracted to nectar-rich flowers such as buddleias and verbena bonariensis. To attract birds, who will eat many insects, slugs and snails, plant as many berrying trees and shrubs as possible.

Not only will birds feed on the berries but will look for insects that live there also. Trees and shrubs for birds include rowans, cotoneasters, pyracanthas and hollies. *Hedera hibernica* (Irish Ivy) is one of the best plants for nature insects and birds alike as it has flowers, berries and is evergreen, which provides cover. To keep it in check, just cut it back hard every few years.

Habitat loss is the biggest danger to native wildlife. As individuals, the best thing we can do is to ensure that whatever land we have access to is managed in a wildlife-friendly manner. If every garden provides food and shelter for wildlife, our whole ecosystem will benefit.



TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Media go quiet as Advent season settles in

The low key arrival of Advent tends to impact mainly on religious programmes.

Some of last week's discussions on **The Leap of Faith** (RTÉ Radio 1) were particularly topical. Presenter Michael Comyn started with a beautiful Christmas piece by Mendelsohn, and then got into an exploration of attitudes to Advent and Christmas.

Fr Desmond O'Donnell wanted the Church to abandon the word 'Christmas' in favour of 'Nativity'. 'Christmas', he said, used to capture the deep reality for believers that 'God walked in our shoes', travelled the human journey like we did, but now it was all Santas, bells and nice dinners – a lovely experience but not describing the reality that it used to.

I suspect the two words in question will continue side by side, and that we'll live with the paradoxes of faith and commercialism. We do ambiguity quite well.

Rev. Dr Ian Paul, the Dean of Studies at St John's College, Nottingham, was certainly concerned about the excesses of commercialism at this time of year, including what he called "absurd luxury Advent calendars". He cited a bizarre Advent promotion, a set of 24 small bottles of special whiskey, costing £12,000!

Another Advent calen-



Spirit Radio's Wendy Grace.

dar, promoting food products, led up to the final panel revealing a sausage roll in a crib – offensive to both Jews and Christians. "Is there anything sacred anymore?" he wondered, though he had doubts about Christians getting outraged as sometimes the resultant free publicity was the whole point of a provocative campaign (though none of this is so crass as the 'Advent for Choice' initiative currently being promoted on Twitter by pro-choice campaigner Ailbhe Smith).

Dr Paul was also concerned about the personal

debt incurred by many as a result of this commercialism. Comyn asked him if he wasn't being 'a bit big brotherly', but Dr Paul said he just wanted to ask questions about values in life. Mind you, asking questions can get you into lots of trouble these days – ask George Hook!

Values

Also on the values theme, Lord David Alton has been a long time pro-life campaigner, and argues reasonably and calmly at all times. He was interviewed by Wendy Grace on Spirit Radio's **Morning Show**

last Friday and managed to make convincing arguments in a most rational manner.

He spoke of the "extraordinary toll of life" in the UK since abortion was widely legalised – over eight million deaths. The law, he said, becomes 'normative', so that people eventually assume that what's legal is right. If we assumed it couldn't happen here as it did in the UK, we needed to wake up and 'smell the coffee'.

As the culture changed the next step was the oppression of free speech, and he instanced recent examples, such as the Catholic commentator Tim Stanley being 'no-platformed' at an Oxford college when a planned debate on abortion was shut down.

He referred to damning reports from UK health authorities about abuses in abortion clinics, including the discovery of baby bodies



Rev. Dr Ian Paul.

in an open trash can – surely a telling image for our times and the disregard for human dignity. I can smell the coffee already.

Impression

Another reasonable man, David Quinn of this parish, featured in another interview, Tuesday of last week on the **Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk), prompted by the publication of his new book *How We Killed God (and other tales of modern Ireland)*. It was a cheerful interview and I got the impression that it was enjoyed by both interviewer and interviewee.

Much of it focused on Quinn's marriage to a Protestant woman and two of his personal journeys – from insurance to journalism and from drifting Catholicism to a more committed version. He felt there was no need for civil law and Catholic moral law to be aligned in all cases, though he made an exception of abortion as it was a matter of life and death.

His opposition to same-sex marriage came from his views on the nature of marriage and parenting. Kenny seemed to get Quinn's point about gender balance in marriage as he recognised a tendency towards gender quotas in society, for example a desire for more women in politics, but the pro-SSM arguments seemed to contradict that.

PICK OF THE WEEK

FERN BRITTON MEETS... BARBARA DICKSON
BBC 1, Sunday,
December 10, 10am

Singer Barbara Dickson talks about how her conversion to Catholicism helped her overcome many obstacles and how faith is a key part of her life.

CATHOLIC LIVES

EWTN, Monday, December 11, 10am
David Kerr speaks with Bernadette Smyth founder of the Northern Ireland based pro-life group Precious Life.

CHOIRS FOR CHRISTMAS

RTÉ lyric fm, Wednesday, December 13, 1pm
A flavour of the Christmas spirit as Evelyn Grant plays a selection of the entrants to Ireland's biggest choral competition.

All in all it was a positive exchange, though I did manage a wry smile when Kenny said, "we're always looking for two sides in a debate". I beg to differ.

1 boregan@hotmail.com



Aubrey Malone

Film

Films on show over the coming Christmas period

Christmas brings out reactions in us that we might be too reserved to give vent to at other times of the year. Maybe that's why films about the festive season, or those set in and around it, have such an emotional impact on us – and why they last down through the ages.

I'm thinking of classics like *Miracle on 34th Street* and *It's a Wonderful Life*, which will no doubt be shown on various TV channels over the holiday period. As we watch them – again – no doubt we'll drown ourselves in the feelings of goodwill they call up. What's the betting they'll also show *Holiday Inn* and *White Christmas*? *The Apartment* is another favourite of mine.



Denzil Washington stars with Colin Farrell in *Roman J. Israel Esq.*

Who could resist the sight of Shirley MacLaine running down the street to be with Jack Lemmon on New Year's Eve night with her head back as her hair blows in the wind?

On the big screen there's *The Man Who Invented*

Christmas. It's not about the Messiah but rather Charles Dickens. It focuses on his book *A Christmas Carol*. He self-published this under some duress after his previous three books failed to enthuse the public. Like a lot

of self-published books, it went on to become his most well-known one. Dan Stevens plays Dickens. Christopher Plummer is Scrooge.

Other films that should interest children over the Christmas period are *Brigsby Bear*, built around the TV show, and *Lu Over the Wall*, which centres on a middle school student called Kai whose life changes after meeting the mermaid of the tide.

Family drama

Song of Granite documents the life of the great "sean-nós" singer Joe Heaney from the west of Ireland. *Happy End* is a family drama set in Calais against the backdrop of

the European refugee crisis. It stars Isabelle Huppert and veteran Jean-Louis Tringant. *The Disaster Artist* deals with the friendship between two actors appearing in a poor cult film.

Roman J. Israel Esq. features the very busy Colin Farrell as a ruthless lawyer who recruits the idealistic title character (Denzil Washington) to his firm. *Better Watch Out* is a comedy thriller about a babysitter and the 12-year-old child she's minding being terrorised by invaders.

Stronger is the inspirational story of Jeff Bauman, a survivor of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing. He became a role model for people in the gallant way he dealt

with the loss of his legs in the explosion. Bauman, played by Jake Gyllenhaal, was important to the police investigating the atrocity because he identified one of the brothers responsible for it.

Wonder is another inspirational story, this one based on the life of August Pullman, a boy whose facial deformity makes him the butt of jeers from other pupils when he attends school for the first time. He's played by Jacob Tremblay, who was so entrancing in *Room*. Julia Roberts is the mother who gives him the belief in himself that helps him overcome the taunts, and become quite extraordinary by the end.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Children's books for Christmas

This week we present a selection of books available this Christmas time for smaller children and young adults.

Younger children

The President's Glasses

Peter Donnelly
Gill Books, €14.99

This must be the delight of the season for both children and parents. It presents the president as slightly forgetful – well it comes to us all. But the discovery that he has to sign important documents at Dublin Castle and his glasses are at home in the Park leaving him needing to be saved by his reliable pigeon friend.

A lot of fun with Dublin life follows before the day is saved. A delightful pigeon-flight of fancy. For adults a hint that he has now become a figure of national folklore. His Excellency is a coo-in for another term.

Sam the Most Scaredy-cat Kid in the World

by Mo Willems
Walker Books £7.99

Latest from the well-established artist and animator. The notion of scaring one's self witless when it's really one's best friend that one sees in an unusual light, struck a chord of recognition (at least with this reviewer – how well I recall me and my best friend next door scaring each other by each imitating Michael Landon in that notorious werewolf film when we were ten).

But this is a book for young readers. It gives quite the same agreeable thrill, yet has a happy outcome. Essential moral of the tale? There is no need to be scared of anything.

The Wonderling

by Mira Bartók
Walker Books, £14.99

This is an enchanting book for the same age that enjoys *The Wind in the Willows*, a sort of *Christmas Carol* crossed with a touch of *Hard Times*.

She herself admits to the influence of *Black Beauty* and *The Call of the Wild*. This mixture of Victoriana and almost human animals is the author's first book, and her readers will look forward to many more at Christmases to come.

Ms Bartok, who lives in America, says: "At first I drew Arthur, the hero of my story,



as a one-eared rabbit, but he eventually turned into a fox. I especially love foxes because my dog looks like a little black fox. But most importantly, I wanted Arthur to possess a secret musical gift and to have a kind and innocent heart, like the beloved pig in the story *Babe*."

Thanks to a large dose of good luck a film is already on the way. Expect to hear much, much more about the character and the author.

Older children

Alexander Hamilton: Revolutionary

by Martha Brokenbrough
With the extraordinary musical, a major success on Broadway, due to open in London before Christmas, and to follow here in due course, this book is aimed at an older young readership (12 up according to the publishers).

It was the up-to-date music styles of the show that made it popular, giving to the audience a contemporary human edge. This book aims to fill out the history and the social and political backgrounds. With strange things happening these days to the American presidency, it does no harm for maturing

citizens still at school to learn something about the realities of the American Revolution, to which our own revolution owed so much.

Hamilton, in many ways, was the most influential man in creating the society and institution of modern America. He wrote 51 of the 85 *Federalist Papers*, which, to this day, are the single most important source for thinking about the Constitution. The serious matter of nation making, which is what our decade of commemoration is supposed to explore, is seen here in a new light.

[Grown up readers might like to know that the musical and this book draw heavily on Ron Chernow's 2004 *Hamilton* (Head of Zeus, £15.00 pb).]

Adventures of a Young Naturalist: The Zoo Quest Expeditions

by David Attenborough
Hodder & Stoughton, 25.00
What a delight David Attenborough was at the beginning of his career. I have to confess that I still have the original books on my shelves, and from time still enjoy dipping into them. Today with *Blue Planet*, Sir David's programmes depend on a multitude of contributors around

the world and are in full colour. But back in the early 1950s it was just the man himself and his cameraman Charles Lagus, two against the wilderness.

The programmes were shot in monochrome 16mm film, the sound recorded by Attenborough. And they were as much about people and the rapidly disappearing tribal cultures of the world as about animals.

Here are those books but with a plethora of colour pictures for a new generation. Sir

David would encourage anyone to become a naturalist and environmentalist.

But one still hankers after the original simplicity, innocence and simplicity that has fled from both the world and from television.

...and a bit of seasonal religion

Though Christmas is supposed to be a celebration of the birth of Jesus, many people would hesitate before

giving a book with a religious theme to their children. But when you give it a thought, this is a baseless fear.

Religion is not just for Sundays, as they say.

So here a few suggestions for those really seasonal books...

The Children's Illustrated Bible: The Most Famous and Treasured Passages from the Old and New Testaments

by Victoria Parker and Janet Dyson
Armadillo Books, £20.00

For Christians, Jews and Muslims the Bible, or at least the Old Testament, is a foundation document. One cannot begin to early to learn about it, the people who created it and the beliefs based on it at too early an age.

This attractively illustrated Bible might be a good beginning. The material also comes in the form of an Old Testament and New Testament volumes, for those who would prefer that approach.

The essential stories of the Bible are simply told and brought to life for the imaginations of the young by more than 1,500 classic illustrations from over the centuries.

Every home should have some kind of Bible, for the children of Western cultures cannot be truly educated without some knowledge of what it says. Muslims, Jews and Christians of all kinds should emphasise what they share in religion, not what seems to divide them (but which with proper understanding might not do so).

Pope Francis Selected Prayers

Veritas €4.99

The present Pope is a prayerful man, and this book brings together a selection of the prayers Pope Francis has issued since coming to office suitable for all occasions. Prayer, according to Pope Francis, does not work "like a magic wand" but instead helps "us to keep faith in God, and to entrust ourselves to him even when we do not understand his will".

They highlight his special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, but also his sincere engagement with issues such as peace, the environment, and especially the modern family.

Young people cannot pray without some guidance and



David Attenborough on location in 1956.

Readers should note that *The Irish Catholic* circulates throughout the island of Ireland and the book prices listed are the retail price recommended by the Irish or British publishers, in either euros or sterling, as a general indication of what purchasers may expect to pay.

A short plea for reading classics

Robinson Crusoe, as imagined by N. C. Wyeth.



Peter Costello

At this time of the year publishers are particularly anxious to push their new wares. That is all very well for them, but many readers might also like to read something older, to return to the classics of all kinds that were the common rereading of yesteryear.

Oddly enough as a result I suppose of the austerities and the war years, at Christmas I often got a book which had been so to speak “pre-loved” as the phrase is these days. I did not mind this. Another’s name on the fly leaf was often a signal that this might be a book well worth reading.

“The island which dominated our imaginations in the earlier years is only part of the narrative”

It was in this way that I got the William books I loved and a little later the *Swallows and Amazons* series by Arthur Ransome. Even my copies of *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Swiss Family Robinson* (though every child feels they

could do without that preachy know-it-all father), and *The Children of the New Forest*. The books of Patricia Lynch, with her hardy children and heroic tinkers, came down from my older brothers. And of course I had the run of my parents’ shelves which contained many books certainly intended for much older readers!

Latest thing

Even today, when everyone one seems to be reading the very latest thing, I prefer to go back to those older titles. What an experience, for example, *Robinson Crusoe* is for a returning adult readers. The island which dominated our imaginations in the earlier years is only part of the narrative. Those earlier adventures, capture by the Moorish pirates (the Islamic terrorist of the 18th Century) and his experience as a white slave in the plantations of what Defoe refers to as ‘the Brazils’, seem forgotten today.

Moreover, the edition I had and have contained the continuation of the story, with all those adventures through the wilds of Siberia – no edition now carries that part. Nor the strange third part, which inspired

Camus in *The Plague*, a mystical meditation which certainly changes what one might have thought about the earlier parts. Indeed Crusoe in isolation is much given to reflecting on the relations of God and man in a way which no modern retelling bothers with.

Whatever about one’s own individual reading in earlier years, I would like to make a plea for a return to the classics of the past. In them is truly to be found, not reflections of today’s middle class or working class experience, but the experience of other cultures, especially others cultures that once occupied these islands. It does no good to either children or adults to be always reading about their own kinds of life (as in those innumerable novels that clutter the shops). Real experience of the past and of other people is only to be found in reading the writers of the past. Skip *Wolf Hall*, read Shakespeare!

Only by reading about other people experiences of life and religion can we truly know what they might be by the knowledge of what they have been for others.

the words and thoughts of Pope Francis are a good way to begin.

Gold Collection

by Brian Darcy
Columba Press, €16.99

This might seem to be a book for adults, but the present practise of treating young

“Prayer helps us to keep faith in God”

adults as “children” for too long does not seem to do much to promote mature Christians or informed citizens.

This collection of Fr Darcy’s writing, aimed as always as the widest possible audience, is exactly the sort of book that people in their late

teens should be reading, for the improvement of their minds, the good of their souls, and the benefit of society.

An encounter with the way Fr Darcy sees the world will be a maturing experience that should be encouraged. And in any case he is an entertaining writer.

The World of Books

By J. Anthony Gaughan

Men of God who were much maligned

Sometimes, especially at this time of the year, it is good to look back over the recent past, and perhaps to add a corrective note to what had been written and perhaps widely accepted.

I have been reading lately a book that was given to me as present, but which was published way back in 2004. This is by Donal S. Blake cfc, and is entitled ‘*Sharper Than a Two-Edged Sword*’: *Jerome Colm Keating (1928 – 1999), Christian Brother Extraordinary*, privately published by the Christian Brothers themselves in 2004. (Though now out of print, copies may be available on the internet second hand from time to time.)

Donal Blake, who is the author of a biography of Mother Mary Aikenhead, is the Postulator of the cause of Edmund Ignatius Rice, that patriotic man of God.

So what follows here is not so much a review of a book, as an appreciation of both a gallant man, and of the author who wrote about him. It takes courage to go against the sweep of the tide that is public opinion in Ireland, but both of them did.

This book tells a tale of altruism and idealism symbolised in the life of Brother Jerome Colm Keating, and it also provides the inside story of the Christian Brothers during the last two generations, here in Ireland and abroad.

Jerome Keating was born on a small holding near Cahirsiveen in Co Kerry on October 18, 1928.

He and his brother Michael (who also joined the Brothers) were says the author “typical of a number of local boys who joined the Christian Brothers in the late 1930s and early 1940s. The Keatings came from a small farm of some 30/40 acres at Knockeens just outside Cahirsiveen. Like most families in the area fishing supplemented the family income. He joined the Christian Brothers aged fourteen.”

After graduating as a teacher, he was a member of the staff in a number of the Congregation’s primary and secondary schools specifically established to make education available to the sons of poor and working-class families.

“The author is also able to describe how the Congregation continues to flourish in Africa and India”

But Jerome Keating was recognised as a man of substance. Following attendance at UCD and the Lateran University in Rome, he lectured at third level Institutions.

Brother Keating was a strong supporter of the Second Vatican Council and enthused about its deliberations and the reforms it proposed. Commanding respect

among his peers, he was elected to a number of positions of responsibility before becoming the 13th superior general in 1990.

Leadership in time of rapid change is often difficult. For him and other superiors the period following the Second Vatican Council was particularly challenging as they implemented the reforms of the Council and sought to update the Congregation.

As the author indicates the last decades in the 20th Century were even more challenging for Brother Keating and his colleagues.



There was a catastrophic decline in vocations and many departures. Worst of all, there were the clerical sex abuse scandals and a vindictive campaign by some media outlets whereby, by implication, the whole Congregation of the Christian Brothers and not just a few individuals were involved in abuse or its cover-up.

But the author is also able to describe how the Congregation continues to flourish in Africa and India. Its members remain committed to its missionary purpose and charism. Thus Brother Keating, despite his fragile health, typically spent his final years as a missionary in the harsh conditions of the South Sudan before he died on October 4, 1999.

The author records that “at Br. Jerome Colm Keating’s funeral mass on the October 8, 1999 Brother Edmund Garvey said ‘As Superior General, he was honoured many times and in many places throughout the world. He was not always at home in these situations, but when such honours and hospitality came from poor people of this world, he truly enjoyed himself.’”

He was a good man, well worth recalling. But sad to say there is today no Christian Brothers present in his native Cahirsiveen, beyond the ashes of their dead in the graveyard near the old entrance to the primary school off the church.

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C.W.

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Crossword Junior

Gordius 211



ACROSS

- 1 _____ Da Vinci painted
the Mona Lisa (8)
6 Piece (3)
7 Signal 'yes' with your head
(3)
8 The name of a book or film
(5)
9 A jockey tries to make it run
as fast as it can (9)
12 The Creator, Who lives in
Heaven (3)
14 Throw all around (7)
17 Make your mind up (6)
18 Bucket (4)
19 Creepy-crawly (6)
20 The opposite of hard (4)

fastened when the plane is
taking off and _____ (7)

- 2 Commanded (7)
3 Raids (7)
4 Coming from Holland (5)
5 Took something that did not
belong to you (5)
6 A Grizzly or Polar, perhaps
(4)
10 Sea creature with eight
tentacles (7)
11 In cowboy movies, this
lawman wears a star (7)
13 Huge sea (5)
15 Act unfairly; break the rules
(5)
16 You might burn coal or turf
in this (4)

- 1 You must have your seat belt

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS

GORDIUS No.327

Across – 1 Apothecary 6 Warp 10 Udder 11 Moderator
12 Mammoth 15 Mufti 17 Ovum 18 Ogle 19 Abram 21 Myanmar
23 Payee 24 Tern 25 Mini 26 Squab 28 Logbook 33 Interrupt
34 Ought 35 Nerd 36 Sacrosanct

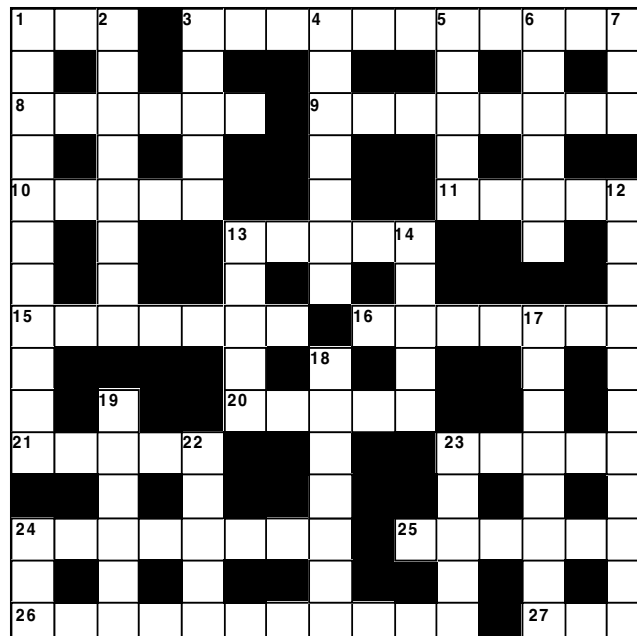
Down – 1 Alum 2 Old Bailey 3 Harem 4 Comet 5 Rude
7 Act of parliament 9 Grammar 13 Only 14 Hobnail boots
16 Compassion 20 Reed organ 21 Members 22 Agog 27 Utter
29 Otter 31 Tuna 32 Stet

CHILDREN'S No.210

Across – 1 Bookmark 6 Bad manners 7 Saddle 8 Jail
9 Thrush 13 Nine 15 Nearly 16 Here 17 Rusty
Down – 1 Babysit 2 Old 3 Measles 4 Rang 5 Cushion
8 January 10 Honey 11 Under 12 Hands 14 Egypt

Crossword

Gordius 328



ACROSS

- 1 Ignited (3)
3 Party of joy and thankfulness
(11)
8 A more coy bowman (6)
9 Upend Tim thus, being
cheeky (8)
10 Identify part of the body, or
Tex will be upset (5)
11 Informs, relates (5)
13 & 25a Legate from the
Vatican (5,6)
15 Irritated, vexed (7)
16 Get Colm one strange
eyeglass (7)
20 Ostentatious (5)
21 & 23 In the noisy confusion
one hears that model Liz is
beefy! (5-5)
24 Thoroughly illuminated, till
food is distributed (8)
25 See 13 across
26 A castle's defensive
parapets (11)
27 Fr Crilly has written a letter
to the editor (3)

DOWN

- 1 Trustful act that is

- accompanied by bounding
hope and a charity jump?
(4,2,5)
2 Disinclined to speak (8)
3 Easily understood (5)
4 Grave words, indeed (7)
5 Grown-up (5)
6 Sailed around one's principles
(6)
7 Immature louse (3)
12 Fleet Street barber, rhyming
slang for London's Flying
Squad (7,4)
13 They write in verse - about
pesto, literally (5)
14 A toilet beside the Big Apple,
initially? How crazy is that!
(5)
17 In which to transport a
sleeping infant (5,3)
18 Iconic Canadian police
officer (7)
19 Test if a rugby score is not
possible (3,3)
22 Tyrollean call (5)
23 Shades of sad music! (5)
24 Small pocket-watch (3)

Sudoku Corner

211

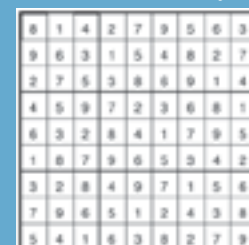
Easy



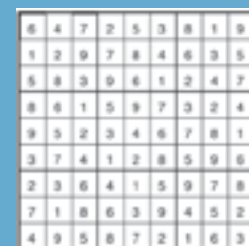
Hard



Last week's Easy 210



Last week's Hard 210



Notebook

Fr Conor McDonough



Appreciate what God has given us all

“FINALLY, BROTHERS and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil 4:8).

This beloved passage often comes to mind when I'm struck by a sudden and unexpected beauty. When the sky gives the quiet gift of snow: “whatever is pure, whatever is lovely”; when a piece of music launches my spirit upward with a crescendo: “whatever is honourable...if there is any excellence”; when I witness an upright human action shining bright against the slough of compromise: “whatever is just”; when words – of a poem, or song, or Scripture – reveal what had been hidden: “whatever is true”.

Amazement

But St Paul is inviting the Philippian disciples, and us, to something more than just occasional, passive amazement. He is inviting us to become seekers after beauty.

In our contemporary context, he is inviting us to venture into the great outdoors, to visit art



galleries and take our time in front of a painting, to listen to music instead of just hearing it, to savour good writing, to have eyes that are practised in the art of gazing.

All of this might sound highly idealistic, and far removed from our hectic daily grind. We might be tempted to respond: “What is true and pure and lovely can

wait until after retirement; in the meantime I have 15 emails to reply to and a child to pick up and three meetings and shopping...”

Such a response underestimates the weight of the passage from Philipians. As St Paul writes this letter, he is not tucked away in a leafy suburb, listening to Lyric FM with a cup of Earl Grey; he's

in a dank prison, awaiting the possibility of a gruesome death. And yet he can say: “Whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely...think on these things.”

Struggles

Seeking out beauty is not something to do when all our struggles are over, when the good fight has been fought; it's necessary precisely to remind us why we're fighting. We grow tired – as parents, as workers, as carers, as volunteers, as pro-life activists, as believers in a hostile public square – and such tiredness makes us susceptible to the cynicism and ugliness of the ambient culture.

We need the daily remedy of beauty to open our eyes again and again to the good we are fighting for: the good of our children, the common good of society, the good of the vulnerable human being, the Good News of salvation.

And we need the remedy of beauty to remind us to lift our eyes to the beautiful good that awaits us when our lifelong fight really is over: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived: what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

Remembering Kavanagh

The last day of November this year marked the 50th anniversary of the death of the poet Patrick Kavanagh. Few poets have insisted as thoroughly as he on the value of the ordinary and trivial.

To find beauty and significance we don't need to travel to great metropolises like gawking provincials; everything we need is in the parish: the “heart-breaking strangeness in dreeping hedges”, “secrecies of stone”, “the prophetic astonishment in the tedious talking/Of an old fool”. “Love's doorway to life/Is the same doorway everywhere” and this is true because beauty and significance aren't manmade, but come from the omnipresent God who is “breathing his love by a cut-away bog”.

● MAKE THE MOST OF CHRISTMAS: How to maintain an ‘Advent spirit’ while the world is pre-empting the Christmas feast? It's the perennial December question for practising Catholics. Here's one idea: make a playlist of music that helps to prepare us for the Lord's coming at Christmas. There are all kinds of possibilities available online: Gregorian chant, like the *Rorate Caeli*; well-loved carols like *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*, *Gabriel's Message* and *O Come Divine Messiah*; and contemporary songs like Matt Maher's *Love Comes Down*. Waiting for the Lord is a unique joy: let's not pass it by this year.



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Poverty is still a plague on our world.

Please support The Little Way Association in enabling missionaries to reduce poverty, and to spread the Gospel in the spirit of St Thérèse.

EVERY EURO YOU SEND WILL BE VERY GRATEFULLY RECEIVED AND SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION.



"Our Lord needs from us neither great deeds nor profound thoughts. Neither intelligence nor talents. He cherishes simplicity."

- St Therese

HELP A PRIEST IN A MISSION COUNTRY TO REPAIR HIS CHAPEL

Priests in mission lands constantly turn to The Little Way for help to build, renovate or roof their chapels. In many places the only roofing chapels have is made of grass which is easily damaged or destroyed. Your gift will help to provide the corrugated iron sheets needed to give a chapel a decent and permanent roof.

PLEASE WILL YOU HELP?
Your donation will be sent intact and gratefully received.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

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(Please state no. of Masses _____)

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☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

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DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.